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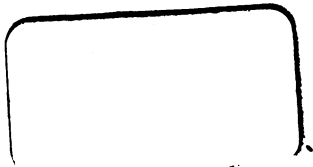
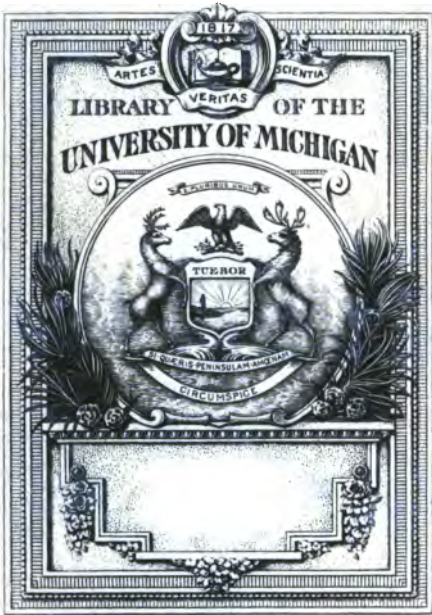
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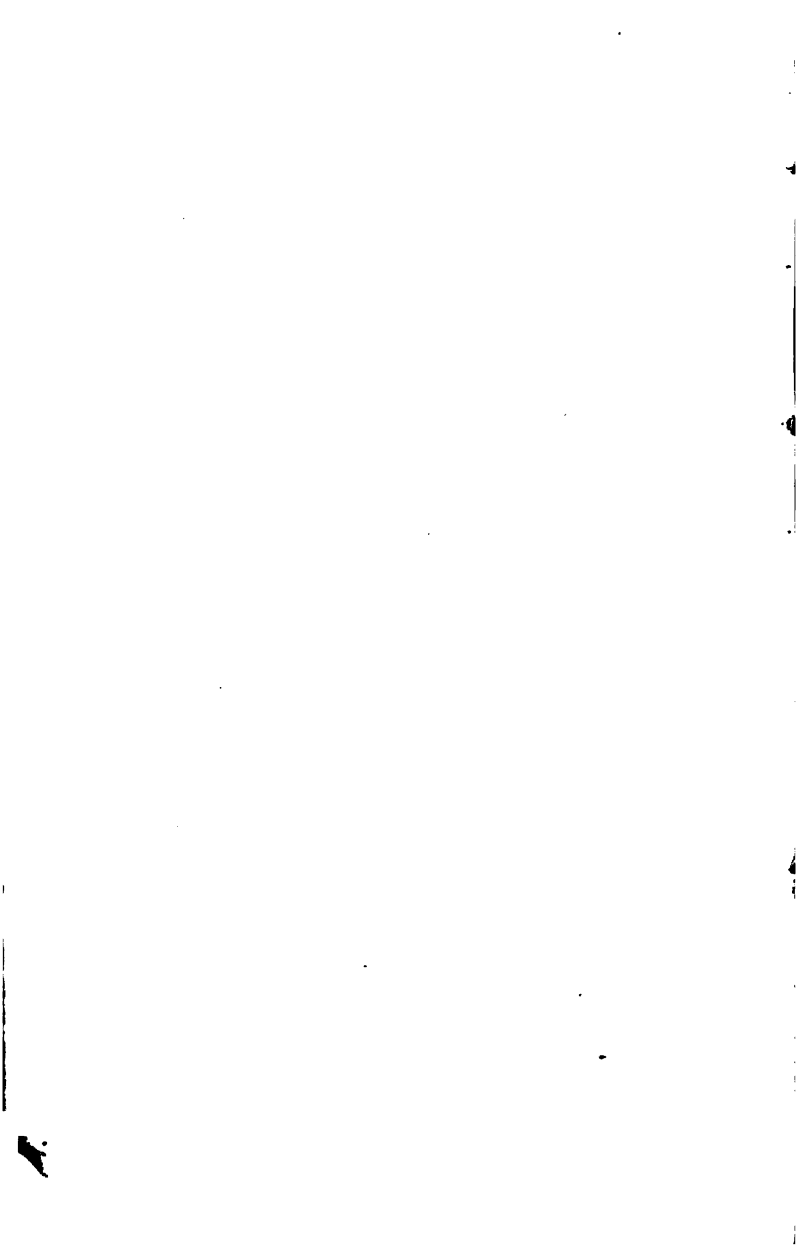
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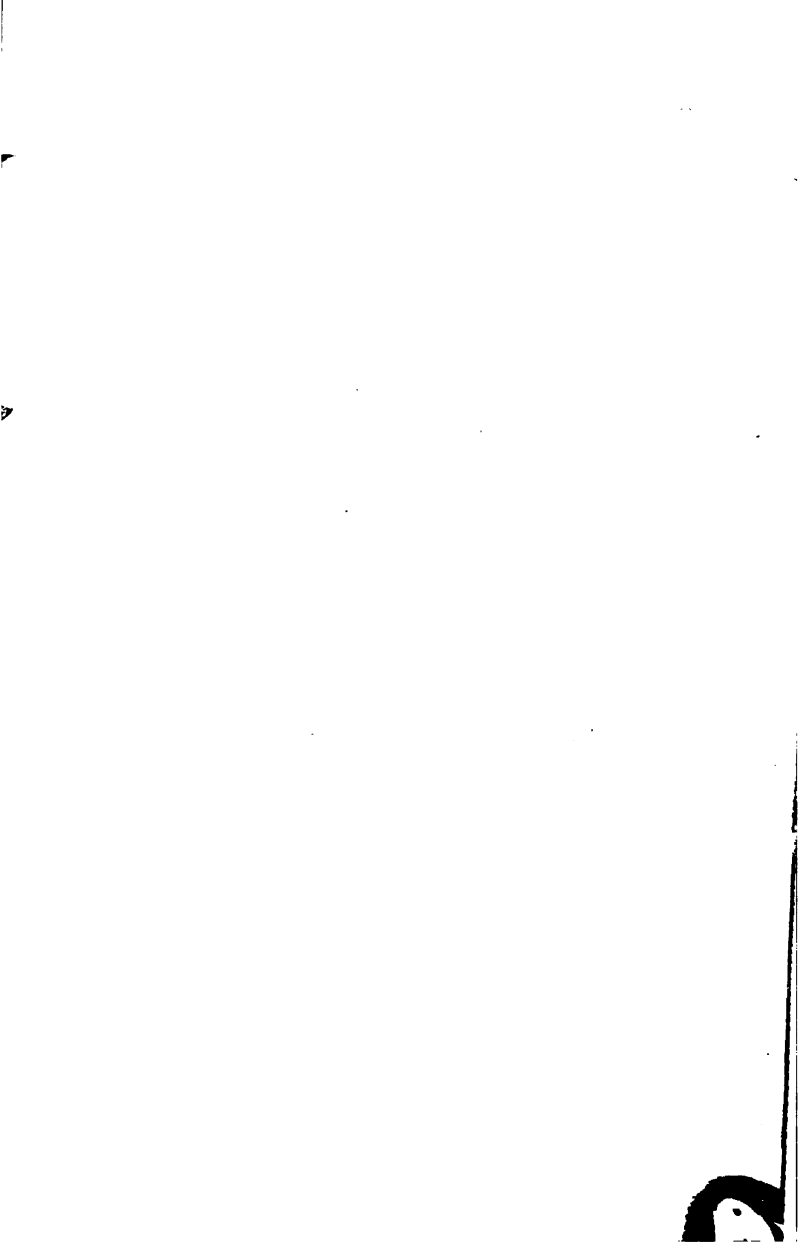
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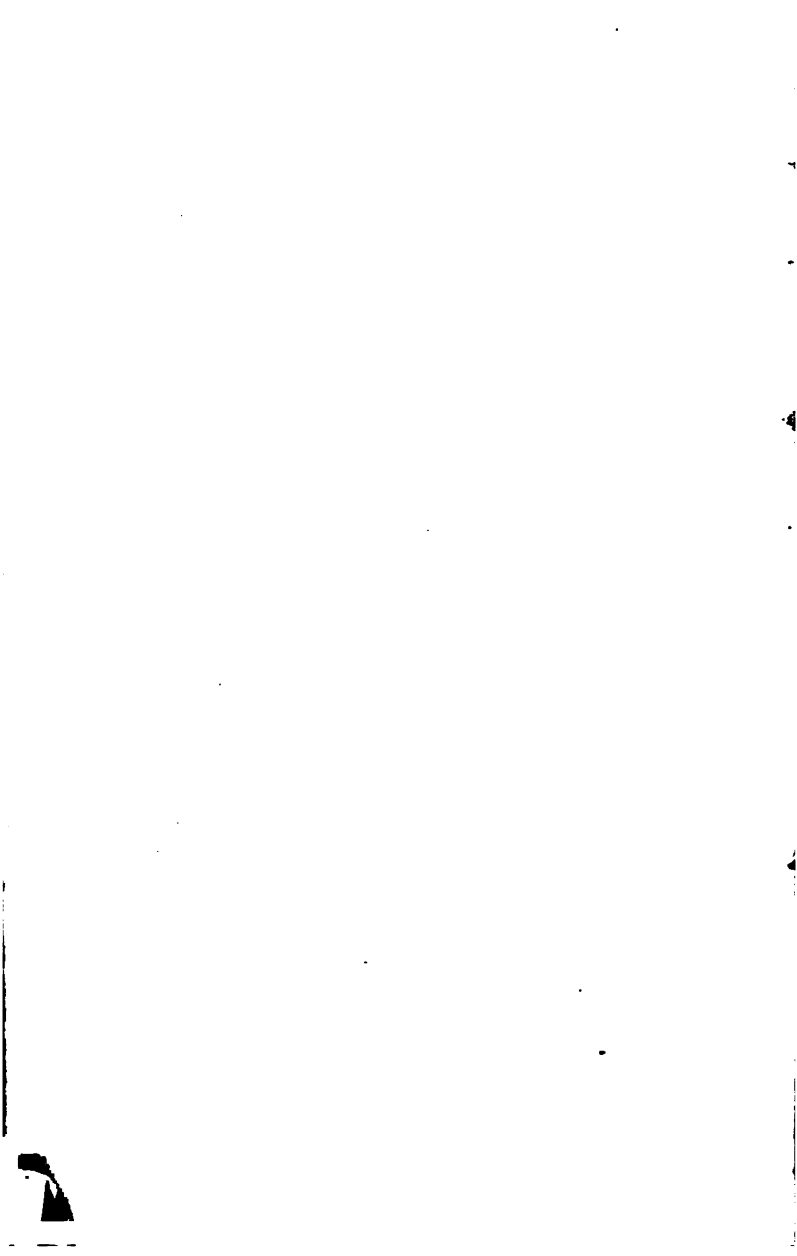
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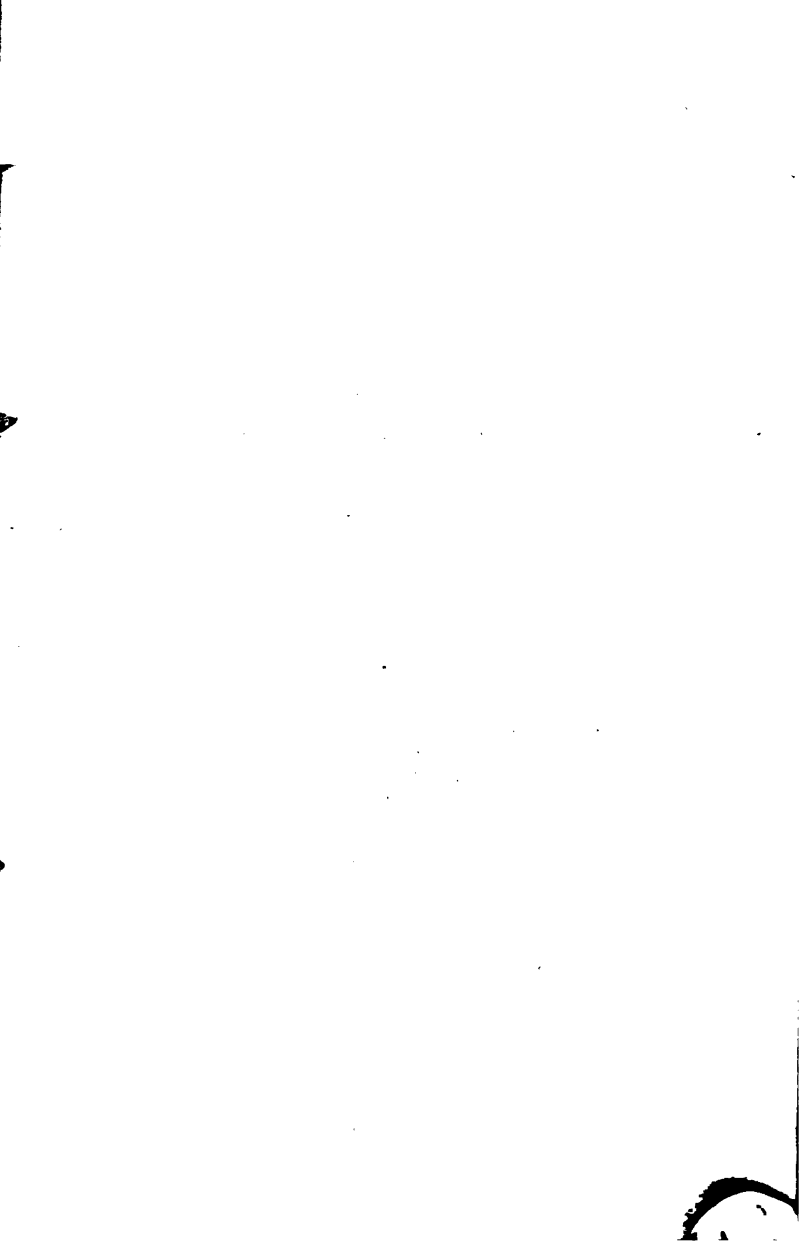
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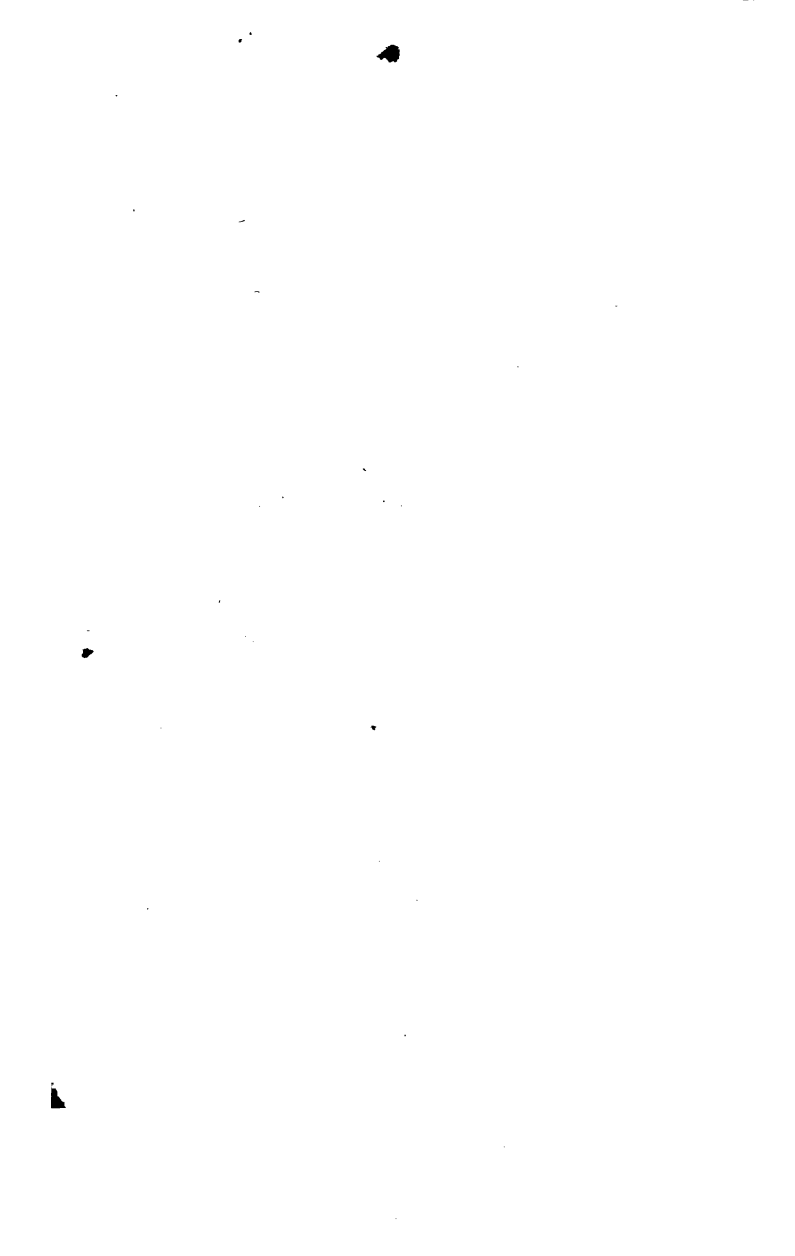
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THE
INCARNATION;
OR,
PICTURES
OF THE
VIRGIN AND HER SON.

BY CHARLES BEECHER,
FORT WAYNE, INDIANA.

With an Introductory Essay,

BY MRS. HARRIET BEECHER STOWE.

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY,

BY MRS. H. E. B. STOWE.

ONE of the principal difficulties realized by those who wish to bring themselves under the influence of the Bible, in commencing its reading, is that want of freshness and reality which is caused by early and long-continued familiarity with its language.

It is true that the Christian, in happy hours and with a mind magnetized by contact with the great inspiring mind of the book, often sees passages as it were illuminated like a transparency, behind which the light necessary for its development has been suddenly kindled. A mind imbued with poetic fervor, or a scholar with leisure to search out, and knowledge to elucidate, may both find means to rise above this obstacle, and read with ever-increasing interest.

But there are many who have, unhappily, yet confessedly, neither devotional fervor, nor communion with the inspiring mind, and are, furthermore, neither poetical nor learned, and

yet are desirous of reading the Bible that they may become spiritual; and they deeply lament when they find that its reading is to them but a wearisome task. In vain they ponder its pages; nothing is suggested; and while words known by heart from childhood pass under their eye, their mind wanders in dreamy vacancy. They start at the end of a chapter, and rise from it sighing and discouraged.

Even the true Christian, of an unimagina- tive temperament, suffers greatly from very much the same cause—the want of wing and fire to rise into the conceptions of the most fervent, the most ideal book that ever existed.

It has often seemed, therefore, to the writer, that no greater service could be done to a large class of the community than to reproduce the Sacred Narrative, under the aspects which it presents to an imaginative mind, with the appliances of geographical, historical, and critical knowledge.

The present work is the commencement of a series which contemplates such a presentation of the narrative of the Evangelists.

There may be some who at first would feel a prejudice against this species of composition, as so blending together the outlines of truth and fiction as to spread a doubtful hue of ro-

mance over the whole. They wish to know that what they are reading is true. They dislike to have their sympathies enlisted and their feelings carried away by what, after all, may never have happened.

To such we would suggest the idea, that no human being ever reads any narrative without some image and conception of what they read; and that the blank, cold, vague, misty images of an uninstructed mind are no *more* like the truth, than the conceptions of a vivid imagination chastened and guided by accurate knowledge of topographical and historic details respecting these distant scenes and events.

For example, no one ever hears of the Virgin Mary without forming some kind of an image or conception of her, it may be, borrowed from some antiquated engraving or old church painting, the fruit of monkish revery or of artistic inspiration; or it may be that there is only a kind of formless mist connected with the sound of that name. But neither the formless mist nor the antique effigy are a whit nearer to the reality than the conception of one who, knowing the strong national peculiarities of her race, and gathering all the intimations of Scripture touching her descent, character, and external position, should embody to himself,

as nearly as possible, the *probable* truth of the case. A reasonable probability, though not like certainty, is still worthy of a good degree of attention and confidence.

So, though incidents may be inserted into the narrative which, though probable by historic verisimilitude, are still confessedly conjectural, yet these are more like truth than a blank, void of any incident whatever; because *some* incident confessedly did occur over and above what is scripturally recorded, and there is, therefore, a large and legitimate field for combined imagination and critical ingenuity to fill up chasms in the most skillful and probable manner.

Thus much, however, being premised, it is due to truth to say, that the writer has endeavored to render the narrative precise and authentic, so far as attention to standard sources of information could avail.

As far as descriptions of scenery, localities, architecture, opinions, manners and customs, &c., are concerned, the writer has preferred, for the sake of accuracy, to risk the imputation of plagiarism, by weaving in expressions of standard authors or of eye-witnesses in ways incapable of being conveniently indicated by quotation mark or reference. For example, the journey

from Nazareth to Hebron is almost step by step the track of Professor Robinson reversed, as given in his Researches. In the descriptions of travelers, whenever there was a picture word or graphic epithet, the writer has unceremoniously seized hold of them, being more anxious to produce a truthful impression than to claim the merit of originality. Nor should we censure this while we praise the painter who seeks to transfer to his canvass the coloring of a Titian or Rubens, or the sculptor who seeks to inspire his marbles with the indescribable graces of the chisel of Praxiteles; we rather should applaud the design of throwing the coloring of imagination around the authentic details of a tome of travels or a dry encyclopedia.

In all cases where the Divine Subject of the narrative has been introduced as speaking, the language has been simply and only that of the Bible, without paraphrase, diminution, or addition; for the author could not hope to achieve what even Milton failed to accomplish, viz., to represent worthily, unassisted by the direct inspiration of the Holy Ghost, the words of one wholly divine. For the same reason, no description of the personal appearance of the Savior has been attempted, as it was believed to be a subject where all words, as well as all ar-

tistic representation, whether by pencil or chisel, must forever fall short of the expectations and desires of the soul that appreciates his glory. That revelation must be left to the disclosures of a coming day.

In the style of writing here adopted, there are, confessedly, great difficulties, more particularly when applied to sacred subjects of so high a grade. To meet every one's ideal, to shock no one's tastes, to impinge on no one's doctrinal views, and to make, in so extensive a subject, no mistakes in points of research, is perhaps a height of success not to be dreamed of. It is only to be hoped that the work, with all the drawbacks necessarily incidental, may offer to many minds a decided advance upon their former conceptions of sacred subjects, and furnish a suggestive stimulus to further mental activity in the same direction.

Many, in this hard and utilitarian age, are wont to underrate the faculty of the imagination, and all that ministers and belongs thereto, as of no practical value. But, for all that, it is none the less a fact, that such a faculty does exist, burning and God-given, in many a youthful soul, and, for the want of some proper aliment, seeks the strange fire from heathen altars, and culls poisonous fruits and flowers from

hot-beds of the god of this world. Even for this fallen and too often erring child of heaven there is, however, bread enough and to spare in a Father's house.

If, then, these pages should suggest to some fervent spirit that it may not be necessary to have recourse to the strains of a Byron, or the glowing pictures of a Bulwer or a Sue, for themes of boundless scope and unutterable brilliancy, then one result, at least, of no inconsiderable moment, will have been realized.



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THE INCARNATION.

CHAPTER I.

CHRISTIAN LOVE.

“**W**HOM have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth I desire beside thee.” This is the natural language of love. Such expressions, addressed to any earthly object, however pure, beautiful, and good, are neither more nor less than idolatry. There is only one being, that is the Lord, to whom the soul may safely utter words like these without the possibility of misfortune.

The reason is obvious. He that created the eye for the reception of light, created also the soul for the reception of himself. As, then, the eye without light, so is the soul without her Lord. And in proportion to the splendor and glory of that Lord, and his superiority to all besides, must be the desolation of spiritual widowhood, the joy of final reunion.

How great, then, is that superiority?

We are, naturally perhaps, first struck with the personal attractions of those we love. Be-

fore we discover the traits of the mind within, we observe, in some of the many forms that cross our path in life's pilgrimage, a nameless grace; somewhat of dignity or of elegance in every movement; a charm in the tone of the voice; a spell in the light of the beaming eye; a magic in all those perfections that fancy is wont to find adorning the person of a friend. These commend themselves to every sense, stamp themselves upon the heart's inner table of memory, and are ineffaceable by all the waves of time. Years may roll away, a frightful chasm yawn between us and some being we have thus admired; age may steal upon us, and the lamp of life burn low, still the slightest look, word, or motion of that long-lost friend will come back to the regretful soul as if of yesterday, and bring with it a thrill of anguish, a sigh of vain sorrow.

Let the mother suddenly chance upon some simple memorial of her child, some article of apparel merely, which has been consecrated by being worn in other days by the lost one, and, as by magic, there before her quickened fancy rises the unforgotten form, every line renewed, every lineament restored, fresh and throbbing in the bloom of loveliness. How often do human hearts bow in hopeless idolatry at the

shrine of personal loveliness, even though that shrine be but the empty shrine of memory?

Yet even in this respect the Christian may doubtless be enabled to say to Jesus, "There is none upon the earth I desire beside thee." What are all charms, either known or conceived, but faint resemblances, so they be true beauty, of that which alone is immortal and ineffable? Man was formed, not mentally alone, in the image of Christ. Jesus now bears, amid the lyres of angels, a human form; oh, passing fair! and in that form he shines unfading—the ideal of all those charms which shed a twilight glow over the loveliest of earth. His eye can radiate glances of celestial light and piercing expression. His voice can rival nature's music and all the melodies of heaven, whether it whisper the low accents of hope and pardon, or whether it rise like a trumpet signal above the thunder of the battle, or the crash of elemental war. His form is replete with glory, and in every step he moves a God.

Let Him, then, assist the sorrowing soul to conceive his beauties, and that soul will cease to compare with him aught which he has made.

But if we are sensibly influenced by personal attractions, still more are we susceptible to the intellectual endowments of a friend.

We discover some wealth of ancient lore, perhaps, or are influenced by the flow of general information. We are kindled by the tones of eloquence, moved to mirth by the flashes of wit, startled by the coruscations of fancy, awed by the sublimity of imagination. And to that commingled whole, which men call genius, ah! how ready are we to render implicit homage!

Especially, if this Promethean spark illumine some vase of finer clay, some form of matchless workmanship, man willingly surrenders his reason in an idolatrous adoration.

Yet here still more may the Christian be taught to say to his Savior, "There is none upon earth I desire beside thee." For in that vase of finer clay—nay, rather, in that form of heavenly mould, shines no created spark, but an eternal light.

And what is knowledge to Him, whose intellect spanned the abyss of space, who sowed the deep fields of ether broadcast with worlds like seedling gems, and spoke into harmonious adjustment the circling orbits of their chiming spheres?

If for an astronomer, by mathematical law, to point unerringly to the place in heaven of an undiscovered planet be pronounced a sublime

effort of human genius, what of that Geometer whose instinct solves unconsciously the mazy movings of these labyrinthine hosts ?

And what must be his logical power, whose name is WORD,* to whom all facts are naked, all contingencies conspicuous ? What his powers, would he but deign to speak, of conversation, description, eloquence, oratory, to whom all times, persons, characters, events, are as now ? What his power of imagination, of ideal creative fancy, who makes the clouds his chariots, and walketh upon the wings of the wind ; who painted the universe with hues of glory ? What, in one word, the power to fascinate, entrance, yea, overwhelm in rapt enthusiasm the listening and beholding soul, of that eternal whole of genius which inspires the countenance of Him who liveth and was dead, and who is alive for evermore ?

But still further we are won by the emotive traits of earthly friends. When, united to beauty and genius, we discover the signs of a heart tender and true, ready to beat responsive to every pulse of genuine feeling, ready to sympathize, quick to bestow, ready to gush forth and mingle in every stream of pure emotion ; when, above all, we find the affinities of such

* Δόγος.

a heart turned subtly toward ourselves, and begin to be conscious in our soul of a received adoration, then the empire over the affection is consummate ; then the deep tides of the human bosom rise, and go over all their banks, and rise as, for earthly objects, they can but once. If, unbereaved, they meet an equal tide, they roll deep and joyous through the channel of life ; otherwise the reflux wave sweeps back, and the soul exhibits but a bare and sandy beach. Such is the alternative of earthly idolatry, such its hazard.

But here the Christian learns by grace to say, "There is none on earth I desire beside thee." For who but He who glisters in our firmament like the tremulous morning star, whose intelligence is beyond the sum of genius ; who but He can love with a love stronger than death, which many waters can not quench, nor floods drown ?

Who but He has a soul prompt to every emotion of pity, of sympathy, exuberant in goodness ? He who wept at the grave of Lazarus, who bore our sins, whose heart was broken by our incredible contumely !

There was a tide of love, shoreless and unfathomable, and on its wave He was borne into life. That love rose to its height out of the

deep abysses of His nature; but at the highest what did it meet? When it sought our answering love, it met the howls, the hisses, and the buffets of a sacrilegious mob; the scourge, the crown of thorns, the cross, the deep abyss of death, the malice of all hell.

That was the love that Jesus loved, and all to the guilty, faithless-soul! a love which, once requited, will roll down all blissful through the middle channels of eternity. A love, to know the length, and breadth, and depth, and height whereof is the beginning, middle, and end of all religion.

Ah! let the spirit be but assisted to receive the fullness of this love shed abroad within, and it can not consent to compare therewith the love of any earthly idol.

But if such be the comparison of Jesus with the most ideal beauty, genius, and affection of earth, of course there is nothing else left on earth to compare him with.

Place all the diamonds of Golconda upon the brow of one of God's creatures, master-pieces of his handy-work, and one glance of love from out the dark eye beneath were worth them all. The whole earth is but dross compared with love. Yea, "if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly

contemned." But if earthly friends can not, without degradation, be compared with the world beside, how much less Jesus, that heavenly friend, so infinitely their superior!

Neither will heaven ever reveal aught to reverse this superiority. "Whom have I in *heaven* but thee?" Not even the departed, the loved and lost, can stand between the spirit and her Lord. Now the visions of Jesus are few, faint, and far between. The mists, miasms, and damps of earth rise murky. The treacherous heart lingers near some lower shrine. Bewildering clouds beset the view. But oh! in the resurrection dawn, when heaven is all abroad and Jesus shall appear, all heaven will contain but only Him! No cloud between, no lower shrine. Beholding with open face the glory of the Lord, we shall be changed into the same image from glory to glory. Then, at last, will the guilty, wandering exile of earth, an exile from Eden no longer, panting no more with weariness, soiled no more by sin, exclaim, "I am satisfied, for I am awaked in thy likeness!"

But perhaps these pages may meet the eye of some unhappy wanderer on those sad confines between day and night, where doubt divides Christianity from Atheism. Perhaps such

an one may be ready to turn from what is here written as a mere rhapsody. Beloved friend, listen to a simple closing confession. Once the writer of these pages wandered in those thankless realms where you now abide. From early Christian instruction, and hopes, and prayers, he passed out into the outer climes of doubt, nay, of utter disbelief and strong denial. He sounded all the deeps of fatalism, pantheism, atheism. Years he wandered there. And, reader, you will understand him when he testifies that in all those regions happiness is not to be found.

After a series of internal changes, so gradual as to defy chronicling, he turned, benighted, to Jesus, whose character, considered purely as a work of art, he had, through all those wanderings, admired as perfect—against whom he had uttered no word of blasphemy. He prayed hypothetically, that Jesus, *if real*, would answer. He commenced those studies which eventuated in the writing of these chapters. He said to himself, “If Christ *be* a reality, I will give him the opportunity to show it.” He sought to imbue his mind with the New Testament.

The result was, O friendly reader, he found Christ *was* real. He had compassion, and answered so faint and faithless a cry! He taught

the ideas, he inspired the emotions these pages contain, and they are written that *you* may believe, and go and do likewise; that you may be enabled to say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth I desire beside thee!"

CHAPTER II.

PROPHECY.

IN Eden was the germ of all prophecy. "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy SEED and her SEED. He shall bruise thy head; thou shalt bruise his heel."

Various considerations have induced the belief that our first parents were instructed to regard this mystic SEED as no less a personage than Jehovah. Hence Eve's exclamation on the birth of her first child, "I have gotten a man, THE JEHOVAH!" Hence the rivalry between Cain and Abel. Hence the death of the latter, and expulsion of the former. Hence the unhappy mother's name for her next child, Seth, "THE APPOINTED." Hence, a thousand years after, Enoch, the seventh from Adam, exclaimed, "Behold, Jehovah cometh with his holy myriads." Hence other incidents of the antediluvian period.

Seven hundred years after Enoch's translation, the family of Shem was elected to produce the expected SEED.

Three hundred and fifty years later, a single

man was chosen, Abraham, out of a world gone into idolatry.

Next the promise was individualized to Isaac, then to Jacob, in language still significant of the Eden oracle: "In thee and thy SEED shall all nations of the earth be blessed."

Jacob, at his death, designated Judah as the chosen tribe. "The scepter shall not depart from JUDAH, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and Him shall the nations obey."

Two and a half centuries afterward, Balaam saw afar the STAR that should come out of Jacob.

Moses spake of a PROPHEt whom the Lord God should raise up.

Thus the annunciation, which begun with the idea of deity—Jehovah, was in the course of ages developing successive features of humanity.

Job hereabouts declares, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and in the latter day he shall stand upon the earth."

Here came in likewise the mute but impressive testimony of the paschal Lamb, and the blood of bulls and goats. Here the Levitical brocade was woven stiff with golden threads of Messianic promise.

Four hundred years more, and David's royal

line is constituted the order of succession: "Thy house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee." And when the king went into the temple to give thanks, his language, as rendered by some, seems to refer to the old Eden legend, as if full well he knew its import. "And is this the ORACLE concerning the MAN—JEHOVAH?" Hence from the writings of this inspired bard alone may be gleaned a most significant series of intimations.

"The assembly of the wicked enclosed me. They pierced my hands and my feet. They parted my garments among them. They cast lots upon my vesture. Thou wilt not leave my soul in Sheol, nor suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast ascended up on high, thou hast led captivity captive. Sit on my right hand till I make thy foes thy footstool. Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek. Let all the angels of God worship him. Let the heavens rejoice, and the earth be glad before Jehovah, for He cometh to judge the earth."

Two and a half centuries later, Jonah, Amos, ISAIAH, Hosea, and Joel began to weave together the mystic woof.

In accepting the first-mentioned of these as his type, our Savior may perhaps be regarded

as assuming his language, at least in one impressive particular: "I went down to the bottoms of the mountains: the earth with her bars was about me for ever, yet hast thou brought up my soul from the pit, O Lord."

Isaiah declares his birth of a virgin, names him Emanuel, depicts his sad fate, calls him a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and reveals the circumstances of his death and burial. He declares, also, his resurrection and triumph: "He shall swallow up death in victory."

Micah names his birth-place, Bethlehem Ephratah.

These oracles of the Esaian period, extending through about threescore years, were succeeded by those of the captivity. In this latter constellation, Daniel is the star of first magnitude, as Isaiah in the former. He chronicles the rise and fall of four empires, the perpetuity of a fifth. He introduces chronological admeasurements; gives the seventy sevens; the time, times, and dividing of a time; the celebrated twelve hundred and sixty, twelve hundred and ninety, and thirteen hundred and thirty-five days, all closely related to Messianic eras.

Haggai, as the close of prophetic time draws on, cries, "Yet once it is a little while, and I

will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and the desire of all nations shall come."

Zechariah describes his humble entrance into Jerusalem, riding upon an ass's colt; and Malachi winds up by declaring, "Jehovah whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple," and promising a precursor.

Thus closed that mystic song that had been singing for ages, now dying away in murmurs, now swelling out in bursts of harmony; song upheld by mingling voices of patriarch, psalmist, and seer, since near four thousand years. "Its quivering chord had gone out into all the earth, its music to the end of the world." Its vibrations woke the lyre of Paganism to bewail a golden age departed, to sigh for its return. Long after David's harp had ceased to sound, the Ascrean bard began:

"Oh, would that Nature had denied me birth
In this fifth race, this iron age of earth;
That long before within the ground I lay,
Or long hereafter would behold the day."

And while Elijah bowed in Carmel before the still small voice, Homer was weaving his tune-ful tale of gods and goddesses Olympian.

And while the constellation of the captivity throws a far ray athwart the pagan chaos, Phi-

losophy sends Thales to light, at Babylon, the earliest Ionic taper.

Pythagoras also kindles there his Italic torch, and lends a borrowed ray to Plato.

Anon, while Ezra and Nehemiah are closing the annals of sacred revelation, Herodotus starts from fabulous somnambulism to begin authentic history, and wends his way inquiring to old Babylon.

And when Malachi is closing revealed religion, devout Paganism commands a Socrates, a Plato, a Confucius to originate theology.

Yea, while the mighty orbs of inspiration, conscious of the coming sun, and, paling before the dawn, withdraw their shining, upward at once she soars to classic zenith with all her lesser lights. Now first she bids the world believe, history, science, religion, poetry, and art are born. Haughty Alexander she employs as her schoolmaster to teach barbarian lips to whisper Greek. Then furtively she scatters all abroad in her domain the stolen rays of Hebrew fire, gleaming from the Alexandrine scroll. And thus, with old tradition, scripture cross-light, and new-born classic genius, she bathes the dreamy nations with a chilly star-light, and calls it day. The sleeping millions stir and sigh as dawn approaches, in troubled slumber.

We hear them moaning in their dreams, calling to one another in restless presage of the breaking day. "It is contained," they whisper all over the benighted orb, "in the fates that at this very time the East shall prevail, and some who shall come out of Judea obtain the empire of the world."

"Haste!" we hear one cry, "thou mighty offspring of Jove! hasten thine appearing;" while the tremulous earth, sea, and heaven exult in the impending era.

So, perchance, on darkling plains of Bethlehem, the shepherds scanned the faintly-kindling east, and began to augur day. Yet twilight, chill and cheerless, clothed the silent fields.

But as on their astonished vision a dazzling Shekinah burst through azure empyrean, and harmonies ineffable charmed their ear, bringing morning all surpassing down around them, so through moral empyrean, upon chill and cheerless starlit human thought and feeling, burst with rapturous light and melody the all-outvying dawn of Messianic love.

If such, however, was the waiting posture of the pagan mind, what of the mind of Israel, long taught and long anticipating? To what a pitch of holy fervor might we not expect their souls would be exalted? And how can

we account for that posture of far other emotion they too terribly displayed? Had they not been blind and slow of heart to believe all that their prophets had spoken, what might they not have penciled, in perfect Messianic portraiture, out of so vast and varied artistical material?

Let us a moment seize the pencil, and throw upon the canvass at least a sketch of what they might have drawn, and filled out with richer, deeper, and more delicate coloring.

MESSIAH THE PRINCE.

“Four hundred and ninety years after Cyrus’s decree, born of a virgin in Bethlehem Ephratah, shall arise the loveliest son of man. Profound in wisdom, gentle, meek, and lowly. Deliverer of the poor and needy, binder-up of the broken hearted, opener of the prison doors, he shall be himself not unacquainted with grief. He shall be a man of sorrows, and shall bear all the afflictions of mankind. Yet, though bruised for their sins, he shall be by them rejected, despised, reviled, spit upon, plucked by the beard, smitten on the cheek, till his form and visage be more marred than any man. Oppressed and afflicted, he shall not open his mouth, but be led uncomplaining to death with malefactors; his hands and feet being pierced,

his garments divided, his vesture disposed of by lot, yet not a bone of him being broken. Thus cut off, not for himself, and counted among transgressors, he shall be buried in the grave of the rich, and, while we deem him deserted of God, shall bear upon his head the confessed sins of his people, unto Azazel, in the land of separation.

“Yet shall not God leave his soul in Sheol, nor suffer his Holy One to see corruption. He shall ascend up on high, leading captivity captive, and sit on the right hand of God, a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek, until his foes be made his footstool. He shall swallow up death in victory, and destroy the veil of the covering cast over all nations. They that sleep in the dust shall awake and sing, and his people cluster about his banner in the day of his power like the sparkling drops of dewy dawn.

“He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. He shall rule the nations with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel; and they shall go into the holes of the rock, and into the caves of the earth, for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the

earth. A fiery stream shall issue and come forth before him; thousand thousands shall minister to him, ten thousand times ten thousand stand before him; the judgment shall sit, and the books be opened, and all people, nations, and languages shall serve him. And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Such was the sublime portrait God had shadowed dimly on the mighty canvass.

This Being, soon to be revealed in form, stood there already revealed in description, type, and shadow, and had stood for four hundred years since the voice of Malachi died away.

Yet, when he came into his own land, his own people received him not!

Wonderful contrast between the prophetic oracle and the popular expectation, yet not unaccountable, not unnatural.

The kingdom and the glory, earliest spoken of, oftenest repeated, in greatest prodigality of language, assumed a corresponding prominence in their desires. The humiliation breathed in after and between whiles, like some forgotten Eolian, pouring unbidden murmurings behind the full bursts of an orchestra. There was an underplains of woe, but strange, wild, concealed, and so neglected.

Faith did not neglect it. Penitent piety, then as now, received the atonement. Impenitent masses similarly rejected it.

Consider also their circumstances. Let us stand in their stead. Oldest nation of the world, possessors of the only revelation of the true God, let us imagine our fathers were led, ages ago, by Jehovah, in visible majesty, to their present land, and exalted to unprecedented moral and civil dignity. Oppressed successively by the haughty Assyrian, Persian, and Greek, we have lived to see them go down to Sheol with the uncircumcised, where Pharaoh and his multitude are comforted over them. The scepter has departed from Judah, but not the lawgiver from between his feet. And though the house of David be like a tree cut down to the ground, yet we know that from his root a tender shoot must spring.

Still, our haughty spirits swelling with the dignity of a past career, we feel upon our soil the dark, advancing shadow of that Western power, dreadful, and terrible, and strong exceedingly, already subjecting us to tribute, placing an Idumean on the throne of David, and threatening to trample under iron feet the remnant of our glory.

Prophetic numbers indicate the era of deliv-

erance. We look for our king. We demand, through him, immediate aggrandizement and ample vengeance. Messiah must lift the lion-standard of his tribe, gather the dispersed of Judah, the outcasts of Israel, and go forth to battle.

These visions of grandeur, cherished from infancy, sacred by faith, augmented by suffering, distil venom within our souls, quite exiling the contemplation of a sacrifice, a baptism of sorrow that must precede.

And now, to our thus prepared minds, the hour brings the Man, who, whatever he may propose in future, at present resolutely eschews every office we expect at his hands, and overwhelms our orthodoxy with incredible denunciations.

Can we fail to conceive the consequence? Can we wonder at their conduct? Had we been stationed at the rolling in of such a great cycle of human destiny, might not we have done the same? Must we not tremble to find ourselves, in imagination, prompt actors in every scene of hostility against the presumptuous aggressor upon all our cherished expectations?

Ceasing, then, to reproach what we might have performed, let us seek, rather, calmly to comprehend, in its widest range, the posture of humanity, and proceed to lift the curtain from the drama.

CHAPTER III.

MOUNTAINS OF JUDEA.

IT is the close of a day in June; the fierce heats of a tropical sun are past, and cool winds come gently, breathing odors from the western vales, which slope away toward the dim horizon line of the great sea. To the north, wild mountain ridges stretch forward, swelling in billows of dark verdure, interrupted by sunlit cliffs of dazzling white.

Southward, in a fertile vale, rise, amid embowering orchard, grove, vineyard, and garden, the antique walls of Hebron.

Upon our left, westward winds the Eleutheropolitan military road, and we descry thereon, just emerging from a distant defile, the purple cloaks, gleaming armor, and glancing spears of a Roman cohort, while the hoarse clangor of their brazen trumpets rises faintly on the breeze.

Beneath a huge oak, at a point commanding the entire landscape, we behold an aged pair. The tunic of the one, a venerable personage of threescore and ten apparently, is of dark pur-

ple, its ample folds confined by a silken girdle. His muslin trowsers are of brilliant whiteness, and around his shoulders floats the graceful fringed robe of silk. His lofty turban, by its richness, might seem to indicate the sacerdotal office of the wearer. Sandals, bound with leathern thongs, defend his feet from the flinty road.

Leaning against the oak, his hand extended, and his eye kindling as it rests upon the advancing soldiery, he seems uttering some prediction to the attentive matron at his feet.

“Yea, daughter of Aaron, the day is at hand. Not long shall yonder heathen triumph insulting! An undefinable presentiment weighs upon my spirit. I go up to-morrow to the temple as never before. Forty years have bleached these locks since first I was consecrated to this holy service, and twice forty times have I stood to minister among the sons of Abia, but never before with that forecasting, earnest spirit that now fills my breast.”

“Doth not the spirit of prophecy,” replies Elizabeth, “awake once more in Israel, to tell the coming of the latter day—the downfall of Idumean Herod?”

“The days of Herod,” answers the priest, “full well I wot are numbered. From a child

have I watched the convulsions of this unhappy land, and could recount them to thee to the smallest iota; I remember when this Herod, not far from my own age, an enterprising, sagacious youth, was governor in Galilee, and soon after in Cœle-Syria; and how, after the Parthian captured the Holy City, he hied to Rome. There, through Antony and Augustus, he easily procured himself decreed by the facile senate King of Jerusalem. Full well do I recall his siege of the Holy City, two years later, and the massacre of forty of her chief citizens. I have not forgotten the tragedy in the baths of the palace at Jericho, where Aristobulus, the young, the beautiful high-priest, was found foully murdered, this crafty hypocrite pretending loudly to bemoan the deed! Yes, I recall the murder of his uncle Joseph. I remember the procession of the haughty Augustus through Judea with his warlike eagles, and how this Edomite hung fawning round his steps. Next, I remember the murder of the lovely Mariamne—for whose sake remorse never ceases to haunt him—then of Alexandra. Then arose that insane zeal against things holy, which would have made us Jews to bow before the thousand deities of Rome, until, warned by popular clamors and secret conspira-

cies, the arch tyrant resolved to flatter the nation by rebuilding the sacred temple.

“Finally, I close the scroll of his dark deeds with the murder of his two noble sons, Alexander and Aristobulus. Returned from Rome, adorned with the laurels of heathen literature, they mingled their blood with that of their mother in indelible stains upon the hand of a father! This is that wretch who grasps the scepter long since passed from Judah! ‘How long, oh Lord, holy and true, dost thou not set thy king upon thy holy hill of Zion?’”

“How, then,” asks his attentive companion, “is it written that ‘the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come?’ De we not too mournfully see them passed away from us? Yet where is He whom the nations shall obey?”

“Nay,” replies the sage Zachariah, “say not *both* are passed away. The ‘lawgiver’ is yet between his feet. Judah subsists by his own laws, and wields judicial authority. The scepter only has passed away, even as it was written of profane and wicked Zedekiah, last of David’s line. ‘Remove the diadem; take off the crown; this shall not be the same; exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn it, until he come

whose right it is, and I will give it him.' That diadem that Zedekiah laid off, thou seest, none but Shiloh may put on!"

"And is not his day near?" rejoins Elizabeth, anxiously.

"Ay," responds the other, musingly, "near it must be. Are not the seventy sevens already wellnigh measured since Cyrus's great decree? And as for this tyrant, he lives yet for a season, but the shadow of Azrael darkens gloomily over his dwelling! Disease gnaws his vitals; his subjects abhor him; his family conspire against him. Hoary monster! crimson with murder, foul with every crime that can stain a man, a citizen, and a king, thou standest on the brink of Hades! God shall smite thee, and that right early!"

So saying, while the sun sinks behind the western wave, and the long shadows deepen across the valleys, they seek their quiet mountain dwelling.

CHAPTER IV.

SABBATH IN THE TEMPLE.

BEFORE the first gray streak of dawn has kindled in the east, all is commotion in the spacious courts that surround the sanctuary.

Hundreds of priests are either bathing themselves in rooms prepared for this purpose, or, their ablutions completed, are donning their official robes. At length they stand, unsandaled, on the cool and polished marble, in beautiful array.

Their ample tunics of snowy muslin, reaching to the feet, are girded by a sash wrought in imitation of the scales of a fish, ornamented with embroidered flowers of purple, blue, scarlet, and white, which, twice encompassing the loins, falls down to the ankles.

Glorious band! mysterious ORDER! shadowy sacerdotal race! impressively prefiguring, in mute but gorgeous magnificence of symbolic heraldry, that other, that eternal ORDER of Melchisedek!

Dividing into two companies of several hundred each, yet seemingly small parties in these extensive courts, with a lighted torch in every

hand, they march in opposite directions round the holy place, throwing a ruddy glare upon the white marble columns, and upon the golden plates that cover the walls of the sanctuary.

Meeting on the eastern side, the president of the temple calls to a Levite, saying,

“Go, my son, and see whether it be time to kill the morning sacrifice.”

He, ascending to the battlements, looks forth, and shouts, “It is light!”

“Is the light come so far,” they answer from below, “that thine eyes can see to Hebron?”

If he reply affirmatively, lots are immediately cast for the ministry of cleansing the great brazen altar and offering the morning sacrifice.

The seven gates of the court of Israel are opened, and as the seventh revolves upon its golden axis, a flourish of silver trumpets echoes through every nook and cranny of the edifice. The singers hasten to their desks.

Far, far below, the multitude have caught the summons, and throng the streets toward the long stair-flights that ascend the lofty hill toward the outer gates, while other multitudes from Mount Zion pour across the mighty bridge that stretches over the valley of the Tyropoëon, and conducts them to the temple gate.

The huge folding doors of these are now un-

barred, and swing heavily open before the swelling tide of worshipers.

In they roll, billow after billow, till the vast area of the court of Israel becomes a sea of turbans.

Meanwhile, the victim is slain and prepared, the altar of incense behind the first veil cleansed, and the sacred lamps are trimmed. The lot is again thrown for the offering of incense, a duty which no priest performed more than once in his life, so great was their number.

Zacharias, with deep emotion, for which he yet can scarce offer any reason, receives that appointment, and proceeds, suppressing his emotions, gravely toward the Holy Place, his assistant ringing by the way the great megemphita, or temple bell; a species probably of gong, to summon absent priests to duty.

Now, himself bearing the holy incense, and his assistant a censer of gold containing some of the holy fire from the great altar, they enter by the porch into the sanctuary. By the light of those ever-burning lamps, the assistant deposits the censer upon the small golden altar, which stands just before the mysterious second veil, and retires.

Zacharias remains standing motionless a brief space, when the tinkle of a small silver

bell, ringing without, is heard. At that signal he casts the incense on the fire, and while the whole congregation without are bowing in prayer, a cloud of perfume rises and rolls above, shrouding the Most Holy Place.

After the usual solemn pause of devotion, as the aged priest prepares to depart, a rushing of wings arrests his attention, and an intense brilliance flashes through the wreathing vapor of the incense, whereat the sacred lamps grow pale. An angel stands by the altar, with half-folded, quivering wing, lustrous as a star, beautiful as heaven.

“Fear not, Zacharias,” says a voice of unearthly sweetness, “thy prayer is heard. Thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. Thy joy and rejoicing shall he be, and many shall be glad at his birth; for he shall be great before the Lord, and wine and strong liquors shall he not drink, and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother’s womb; and many of the children of Israel shall he turn unto the Lord their God, before whom he shall go in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and unbelievers to the wisdom of the just, and to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

“By what token,” asks the trembling priest, losing for the moment all his faith in the conflict of emotions within, “by what token shall I be assured of this; I, who am an old man, and my wife so far advanced in years?”

“I am GABRIEL!” is the stern reply, “who stand in the presence of God!”

And the mortal quails at the rebuke for having doubted the truth of one so high and pure.

“I am sent unto thee,” he continues, in a milder voice, “to speak unto thee, and to tell thee these glad tidings. Lo! therefore, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day when these things come to pass, because thou hast not believed my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.”

Thus giving the required sign, yet so as at the same time to impress deeply on the mind the veracity of the heavenly hosts, and how great a crime a mortal is guilty of who doubts their lightest word, the glorious messenger vanishes, and Zachariah remains lost in amazement.

“This—this, then,” he thinks, “is that which weighed so heavily on my soul! This is that which was spoken by the prophet: ‘Behold, I will send unto you Elijah the prophet before that great and terrible day of the Lord!’”

“Rejoice, O Zion! the day-star is rising, the harbinger of peace is already upon the mountains!”

“Now, Roman, tremble, with all thy iron legions. Jehovah shall dash them in pieces as a potter’s vessel!”

While these and similar reflections throng his exulting mind, the multitude without are waiting his appearance. Attracted by the unusual delay, they press from the other sides, in a dense mass, into the eastern porches; every face expectant, every eye fastened on the sacred door. The living flame is glowingly consuming the sacrifice, and the smoke ascends aloft and curls above the battlements. Whispers, like the sighing of the breeze, pass across the surface.

“Why tarrieth the priest? Hath not some evil befallen him? Hath not the Lord broken forth upon him and slain him, even as he slew Uzzah in the days of David?”

But now the doors open. Pale and trembling, he totters forward upon the porch above the area, supported by his assistants, and they stretch forth their hands above the assembly below.

A pause ensues—a breathless stillness.

In vain does Zachariah strive to utter the

customary benediction. Realizing for the first time the infliction of the angel-threatened penalty, he buries his face in his robe, with tears of mingled grief and triumph, while one of the others takes up the blessing, and says,

“The LORD bless thee and keep thee!

“The LORD make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee!

“The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace!”

This done, Zachariah hastily retires to his room in another part of the vast and complex edifice, followed by many of the priests, who eagerly inquire into the circumstances of the case. By signs and by writing, they gradually obtain the outlines of the wonderful vision, so far as the subject of it will allow. These rapidly spread from mouth to mouth through the whole sacerdotal order, creating a sensation most profound. Such direct and heavenly presence has been unknown within those solemn walls for now these many hundreds of years! And the voice of God in his temple, or of an angel messenger, fills every bosom with a shuddering awe! The news, and the sensation it produces, flies beyond the priest's court, the court of the women, and pervades the whole assembly.

And when the remaining ceremonies of of-

fering are complete, and the whole band of Levites break forth into the chant of praise, the sudden emotion lends a thrilling tone to every voice. And as, at every pause in the chant, the trumpets sound with a more thrilling energy, and the people worship, something of the old spirit of the days of David seems waking there, and the loud responses come with heartier zeal.

And the sound of this mighty song, borne upon the voices of thousands, rolls down from that glorious temple upon the silent city below, and echoes, billow after billow, across the surrounding vales and hills.

It is the great national anthem of praise; and doubtless, as it rises up, in the pure morning air, to the serene summer heaven, there goes with it some pure worship out of at least a few hearts in that vast multitude.

And now the last note of the song has died away; the last echo from the deserted streets is hushed, and, treading backward, the people reverently leave the sanctuary. The gates upon the east, west, and south disgorge the living tide down the long marble stairways, pouring along the streets, but now as silent as the tomb. They disperse through the various parts of the city, or through the city gates to their

homes in all the adjacent country, carrying with them, as they go, the news of a strange event, and discussing the same, with industrious ingenuity, into all conceivable attitudes and exaggerations.

Let us follow the steps of two who turn northward, and, passing leisurely along, saunter beneath the grim walls of the tower Antonia.

“What is this new marvel, comrade? for methought I saw thee most devoutly attentive by the railing of the priests’ court!”

“Nay,” replies the other, “I could make naught thereof. A vision, so they whispered—an angel—I know not what; priest’s juggling all.”

“Ay, these ambitious, sanctimonious knaves, they would juggle us into a war with the Romans if they could, and themselves into that ancient splendor they prate so loudly on.”

“For my part,” responds the other, “I have naught to do with their whole jargon of worship; by this token, which shows with what dexterity I have pursued my avocation;” and he held to his admiring comrade a valuable bracelet, which he had purloined in the press.

“Thou sayest!” he exclaims; “right praiseworthy avocation! a true priestly dexterity! for while yon mitred knaves tithe the multitude in

one way, we do the same more quietly in another."

"And a less laborious," is the reply, as they pass beyond our hearing.

Leaving thus the young Barrabas and his comrade, just starting in their career, and whom we may meet again in after years, let us stand by this corner of a public square and listen to others as they pass.

"It is said," cries one of three or four of the common people, "it is said that Messiah is come, and that there will be no more taxes!"

"Nay," rejoins another, "not Messiah, but Elias is come."

These go by, and two Levites and a scribe appear.

"Behold, now," says one of them, "how this accursed populace are gone crazed after the prating of yon driveling dotard! An angel, quotha! and a son from his withered loins! Yet any dream suffices to kindle this rabble like tow."

"Ah," rejoins a scribe, "this is well for thee, who art known to lean to the dogmas of the Sadducees; but there be many wiser heads than thine, which do not wholly make light of this matter; besides, is it not the day when Daniel said Messiah should come?"

The reply of the first speaker we can not hear in the distance.

An aged matron, bowed with near a century's weight of years, now totters slowly by, supported by a youthful damsel. Though both are closely veiled, we hear the matron feebly saying,

"God grant, my daughter, thine ears did not deceive thee! An angel? and a son, in the spirit of Elias? Heaven be praised! To turn the hearts of the fathers, and prepare a people for the Lord? Full bitterly we need it in these awful days of sin and shame! But ah! can it be possible that these old eyes shall yet live to look upon the Lord's anointed?"

And thus, passing round from point to point in this great city, we find that one subject is every where discussed, and that, the wonderful event of the morning's worship. Every possible version of the matter seems already afloat, and noised upon the very house-tops. One affirms that Zacharias himself is Elias; another, that he saw Elias and conversed with him; a third, that Messiah is come or coming. And so, from top to bottom of the community, from priest to Levite, Pharisee to Sadducee, Jew to Roman, honest man to knave, some word is passing concerning the vision, some thoughts

astir concerning future events. The future alone is thought of; the close-impending, mysterious, doubtful, gloomy, glorious future is discussed by every knot, in every corner, and in every market-place. Nor can the loudest scoffers quite suppress a secret sensation of disquiet and foreboding.

One thing, indeed, remains notorious and palpable to all, and undisputed. There is Zacharias fulfilling his weekly ministration under the visible mark of divine visitation. He is dumb, and that in the midst of all the chief men of his nation. And, with all their cross-questioning, they can elicit from him only one plain, unvarnished tale. This fact alone can not fail to afford matter of infinite speculation to all, far and near.

CHAPTER V.

MARY.

FAR in the north, embowered among the mountains of Galilee, lies an oval valley. A deep and silent basin, it receives and concentrates the fervors of August, which make the blood boil and the brain to reel.

Along the barren slope of the western hillside wind narrow streets, with houses of every degree of wretchedness—abodes of want and squalid degradation. This is that notorious village of Nazareth, whose name has become proverbial throughout the nation as an epithet of infamy.

Threading the crooked streets, we climb to the summit of the hill overlooking all the vale below. Here, sequestered from the world, we find a lowly cottage, diverse from all the rest, and half concealed by the luxuriance of its vines, overhanging pomegranates, and other fruit-bearing plants. Here resides old Heli, through whose veins the blood of David flows. Here his gentle daughter, virgin Mary, blooms, unseen by vulgar eyes, save when, on Sabbath

morning, closely veiled, she glides toward the synagogue.

Within her room, methinks I behold her even now leaning among the jessamines which fill the lattice-work of the window, as, with one hand putting aside their redundant shoots, she looks upward through the high, thorny nopal-tree, and watches the white clouds floating in the azure sky, unmoved by a breath of wind.

Very young she seems to me, and very lovely. Not with the voluptuous necromancy of Oriental beauty only, but with those charms resulting from the riches of the soul; riches of thought, of fancy, of emotion, lavishing themselves unconsciously by means of an exquisite symmetry of physical development. I can not rest in that artistical conception of her, so common, I might almost say so hackneyed, which presents to our view merely the embodiment in female form of a certain ideal of saintly purity and grace. It seems to me more natural to conjecture in my visions, as near as may be, the actual truth of her appearance at the very moment she was thus leaning and gazing out of the window. To portray her with golden ringlets, azure eyes, and blonde complexion, may be more poetical, more angelic, more in keeping with the profound worship multitudes

offer at her shrine; but it is not so true to me, and hence is not so beautiful. It is not the Queen of Heaven I wish to see, but a simple, artless Jewish girl.

I behold her a daughter of the Hebrews, presenting that peculiar style of features which in all ages marks that sacred, that mysterious race; a beauty, glorious in its glossy raven locks, lustrous hazel eye, full red lip, aquiline nose, finely-arched eyebrow, and the rich, deep complexion of the East; a beauty which the utmost efforts of the warm pencil of the sunny South, disdaining to imitate, have in vain attempted to surpass or even equal.

Yet while she reclines there before me, with well-defined national peculiarities, I discern in her broad forehead, her steady eye, her firm though gentle mouth, the marks of a mind serene, elevated, and able to reflect justly on life's vicissitudes.

Her youth, though it is in the first perfection of outward bloom, yet wears a subdued, almost sorrowful mien, united to an unconscious dignity, the result of habitual communion with the highest themes, the holiest natures of the past. There beams, withal, in that deep-speaking gaze, notwithstanding its timidity, a light kindled by the indwelling of that peace which the world can neither give nor take away.

On the present occasion, some important ceremony seems about to be transacted; for the dress of the maiden exhibits evidence of unusual preparation. Her tresses flow from under a turban of lemon-colored silk down upon her bosom, which is closely fitted by an embroidered cymar of green, clasped in front with some family jewels, hundreds of years old; for, though poor and greatly reduced, these few relics of an ancient lineage are cherished by old Heli as inviolably sacred. Drawers of pale pink reach to her ankles, which, with the diminutive feet, are left quite bare. Finally, the graceful folds of her gauzy veil, now partially thrown back, yet capable of enveloping her entire symmetrical figure, fall from her head to her feet.

A secret agitation is at times perceptible in her air, as if she were awaiting some crisis, half in hope, half in dread. Outside the door, we hear the voices of youths and maidens, conversing under the tent-like awning which overshades the court; we hear, also, the grateful plashing of the fountain, moistening the sultry atmosphere; and the soft tread of many feet upon the paved floor.

At length they approach her door, and young maidens of her kindred accompany her forth.

A few relatives and family friends are assembled to witness her betrothal to the artisan Joseph. He also, accompanied by kinsmen and friends, appears waiting her approach.

A silence is made, and, as the various members of the company range themselves informally about the pair, he approaches the spot where the trembling maiden stands. Respectfully he takes her hand and places within it a small golden coin, saying, "Accept this, Mary, thou daughter of David, as a pledge that thou shalt become my wife." And with this simple, beautiful ceremony are they inviolably bound to each other, until such time as circumstances permit the marriage rites to be completed.

CHAPTER VI,

THE ANNUNCIATION.

SUMMER has yielded to the keen blasts of winter; winter, in its turn, is yielding to the balmy spring, and imperceptibly arrives the germinant month of March.

The palm, apple, and pear trees are in full bloom, and load the air with fragrance; and verdure carpets again the valley and the encircling hills, where graze the motley herds of cows, camels, and black-haired goats.

It is the hour of evening, and the west is glowing with departing day. Retiring to the garden, Mary seeks a quiet, favorite spot, commanding all the glorious scenery of her native land, and gazes forth with deep delight.

Far in the north, the broken, undulating landscape terminates in majestic Hermon, and his icy crown now sparkles like diamonds in the evening ray.

Southward, her vision flies from hill to hill, and lights on Tabor's castellated cone; thence glancing south, on bleak Gilboa, and thence at length reposes upon the mellow softness of Samaria's blue hills. Then, sweeping round the

westward side of the plain, her eye beholds old Carmel standing sentinel in the sea, bathing his feet in the cool waters, which on either side of him roll their distant waves of molten silver along the gleaming evening shore. Embraced within this mountain girdle, whereof her own rocky heights of Nazareth, from whence she now is gazing, complete the circuit, sleeps in evening light and shade the great battle-plain of Esdraelon, sacred by many a stirring association of ancient story.

“Who would think,” she asks herself, “that such a lovely plain has often been, and shall be yet again, all drenched with blood!”

Thus musing, twilight steals on apace, and the distant outlines grow obscure. As she is preparing to return to her apartment, a foot-step falls close at her side, and a stranger suddenly stands before her. No external splendor betokens the presence of a supernatural visitant, and, deeming him some guest of her father, she immediately drops her veil.

With what surprise does she listen to the abrupt address of this unexpected messenger, delivered in accents which irresistibly command her deepest attention.

“Hail, highly favored! the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women!”

Now, through her veil, Mary can discern nothing but the tall form of a man standing in the twilight; but the unheard-of things he so royally utters fill her with consternation, not unmixed with pleasure, and she internally whispers, "Ah! what can all this mean?"

"Fear not, Mary," is the instant reply of this mysterious personage, who seems to read her thoughts, "thou hast found favor with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end!"

Such an announcement, so plainly spoken to an affianced virgin by a total stranger! With what a strong effort at self-control, and yet with what a faint voice, does she find words to inquire, "How shall this be? for I am yet a virgin."

The reply to this question is given with such sublimity as at last gives the astonished Mary to suspect the supernatural rank of her visitor. This is that man whose voice like many waters Daniel heard by Ulai's banks, informing

him of the four hundred and ninety years that must elapse before Messiah's coming. Those years are almost numbered, and here he stands before her to announce the predestined hour!

"The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore, also, that holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the SON OF GOD! And behold, thy cousin Elizabeth hath conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren; for with God nothing shall be impossible."

The whole truth of the intelligence now at once breaks upon her mind, that she is to be the mother of the long-expected Messiah, an honor through all ages coveted by every daughter of Israel.

Overcome with her emotions, and feeling, in the sudden tumult of excitement, only one distinct sense—submission to the divine will, she replies, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word!" And as she speaks she finds herself alone.

I see her throw back her veil, and, sinking upon the turf, gaze upward to heaven in an absorbing revery; for, educated as she has been, the announcement raises her in a twinkling from an humble obscurity to the highest glory

possible to woman, whether of that age or of ages yet to come.

Across her memory flashes rapidly passage after passage of the ancient seers, all seeming, however familiar to her faithful spirit, now to come, pointed and dazzling as the lightning, into the very marrow of her consciousness. Mother of a king whose dominion shall be universal and everlasting! Well may her brain reel, and her eye grow giddy, as this thought comes over her in the silent night! And, being human, and not free from the opinions of the day, there must be this sudden blaze of ambitious exultation for one moment in her breast.

In far and brilliant perspective she beholds the gleaming standard of a conquering, saintly host. Around that banner white-robed warriors cluster, sparkling like the myriad dew-drops of the dawn; and there, amid gorgeous triumphal processions, royal palaces, and untold splendors, she recognizes one fairer than children of men, her own son, Author, King, and center of all!

But soon her naturally sedate and well-balanced mind reverts to her own immediate situation; and with a sudden thrill of anguish, she perceives the position she must necessarily occupy in the estimation of Joseph, when the ful-

fillment of the prophecy shall begin to come to pass. What will avail to him and to others her story of a vision, and of miraculous interposition, against the damning evidence of her infidelity to her vow? She will not only be disgraced—disowned by those she loves, but her life itself, she shudders to think, will be forfeit to the stern Mosaic code. She can not anticipate any revelation to Joseph which shall corroborate her statement; and thus a sense of despair, the natural reverse of her just now exalted mood, sinks like night upon her soul, and in this palpable darkness she only rouses herself gradually, so far as to engage in prayer to the God of Israel. She retires to her apartment, and it is while there on her knees, in earnest application for guidance in this difficult crisis, that the following reflections suddenly occur to her.

“There is one test,” she thinks, “which can satisfy him, and, peradventure, satisfy my kindred, that I have seen this vision, and received this prediction. I will arise, and will hasten to Hebron to my cousin Elizabeth, and mine eye shall witness the truth of the word spoken concerning her. Moreover, I will declare beforehand to my husband what things are foretold of her, if so be that when I return, and he

shall accuse me, I may say unto him, 'The same angel which foretold the birth of the son of Zacharias, also foretold this concerning thine handmaid!' peradventure he will believe!" And with these natural reflections, this simple plan, she retires to rest, and is soon wrapped in peaceful slumber.

CHAPTER VII.

THE JOURNEY.

IT is early morning, and the sun has not yet risen on the heights of Nazareth.

A thick mist fills the valley, out of which the hill tops, peering, form a twilight archipelago, whereon the morning star looks down in fixed amaze.

A shaggy, panniered mule, surmounted by the martial form of the veteran servant Eliezer, leads the way from the court-yard of old Heli. Another, diminutive in size, and of a beautiful white color, follows, rejoicing in his lovely burden, the close-veiled daughter of David.

Descending the hill, they enter the shrouding mist, and thread the narrow streets, where not an object is yet visible, until they reach, at length, the southern outlet of the valley through a deep chasm.

Emerging from this, they strike southward upon the great plain, carefully following the narrow bridle-path, but unable to see in any direction beyond a few paces distance. An hour they move in silence, when, at some distance in the direction they are pursuing, they

hear the hollow tramp of camels and horses, the jingle of bells, and the confused hum of voices.

“Now, if the sun were risen,” exclaims the veteran, “we might behold yon goodly caravan of the Nile—a pleasant sight!” And, as if obedient to his wish, a sudden ray of glory pours across the plain, disturbing the hitherto so placid lake of mist. It wavers, tosses, and swells in billows, surging, breaking, rising; it rolls up the mountain sides, and floats on high in brilliant wreaths, and heavy masses of gorgeous emblazonry. At the same moment a peal of martial music steals faintly from the northeast, where Tabor lifts his sunlit fortress high above the level plain.

Casting aside her veil, the gentle maiden gazes with mingled sadness and admiration, now in the direction of the Roman garrison, now after the lengthening files of the receding caravan, as they hold their true southwestern way.

“Ah, daughter!” exclaims the trusty steward, himself not all insensible to the associations of the scene, “prouder days hath Tabor seen, when, unprofaned by heathen tower, he raised his beautiful cone of oaks on high, and Barak pitched beneath their shade, and Deborah too, a mother then in Israel, with their hardy warriors! And lo! how well those camels, moving

yonder on the plain below, might stand for Jabin's ancient host! There, too, lay Sisera, with nine hundred chariots of iron, and his thousands all abroad upon the land!"

"And what stream is yonder," asks Mary, following the direction he points out, "whose winding course is marked by the silvery mist yet lingering above the fringing willows?"

"That," replies her guide, "is ancient Kishon, into whose swollen waters the discomfited Gentiles were driven before the armies of the Lord! Methinks I see them now; methinks I hear the current rushing and roaring, and the cries of the flying, and the tide of battle louder than all! Methinks I see the maddening waters dyed deep with blood, and whelming together the living and the dead in promiscuous ruin! Ah! that was an hour of ample vengeance! An hour," he mutters, in a lower tone, and glancing toward Tabor, "that may, perchance, arrive again!"

Mary listens shuddering; yet, absorbed in revery, she seems repeating an olden lay of victory:

"They fought from heaven:
The stars in their courses fought against Sisera;
The River of Kishon swept them away,
That ancient river Kishon:
So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord!"

And now their path begins to cross the spur of a mountain on the left, which presently conceals old Tabor from the sight. Before them, however, a few miles distant, bleak Gilboa presents his rocky northern side. Toward this they now direct their steps, crossing as they go the fertile valley of Jezreel.

This celebrated vale, forming an arm of the great Esdraelon plain, here stretches eastwardly away, between steep hills, toward the shores of Jordan. And through its narrow vista of freshest verdure stand, revealed in far perspective, the towers of Scythopolis, and lofty heights of Bashan.

“Across this ridge,” continues Eliezer, pointing to the left, and pleased to show his legendary lore to so ready a listener, “went the God-forsaken Saul to crave unlawful converse with the dead. And he had his wish. God permitted the gates of Death to yield up their cloudy captive, and an old man came up, covered with a mantle. It was Samuel. And he said, ‘Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? To-morrow thou and thy sons shall be with me!’ And even so it came to pass. There before us, under steep Gilboa, Jonathan and the host were lying. Just behind us, in old Shunem, was the Philistine camp. Upon this

very ground beneath our feet, they joined battle, and when Israel fled, the chase lay forward across the hills, where now you see yon Roman fortress perched upon the barren rock. There Samuel's prophecy was accomplished!"

Opressed with sadness at the recital, the travelers now relapse into silence, and move along for several moments buried in melancholy revery. At length we hear breathed forth, in almost Æolian softness, by a voice sad, low, and of peculiar sweetness and pathos, disconnected stanzas of an ancient dirge:

"Ye mountains of Gilboa! let there be no dew,
Neither let there be rain upon you, nor fields of offerings;
For there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away,
The shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with
oil."

* * * * *

"Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives,
And in their death they were not divided."

* * * * *

"How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle!
O Jonathan! thou wast slain in thy high places.
I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan:
Very pleasant hast thou been unto me;
Thy love to me was wonderful,
Passing the love of woman.
How are the mighty fallen,
And the weapons of war perished!"

And as these tones of tender sorrow melt into the soul, we almost believe we hear an echo of

that olden harp, whose strings, a thousand years ago, swept by ancestral hand, first quivered in this royal chant of woe ; for, beneath that gentle exterior of the simple Jewish girl, we have often delighted to conceive, were hidden all the poetic ardors and lofty enthusiasm of her ancient sire. It was meet they should revive in her—that David should live again in Mary.

Thus was she formed in sympathy with all the mighty themes of those sacred oracles ; thus fitted to transmit a similar fineness of temperament, and to kindle, by her early teachings, the fervors of an opening mind in study of the Eternal Word. Thus the son of Mary would be son of David in a most engaging and emphatic sense.

Arriving at length at a fountain bubbling through the sand at the base of the cliff, they alight awhile, to spend the sultry noontide hour beneath some shady palms. Then, in the cool of day, resuming their journey, they climb the steep path that winds westward, to the top of the precipitous heights of Jezreel, whose massive walls, and gates, and fertile suburbs adorn the summit as with a crown.

Avoiding each frequented thoroughfare, they turn southeastwardly, and follow narrow by-paths through sequestered spots, along the brow

of the mountain overlooking the valley they have just been crossing.

“Here, along these heights,” cries Eliezer, summoning more cheerful memories to dispel their sadness, “was Gideon’s camp of old.” Then pausing awhile, and slowly waving his extended hand above the scene below, “There beneath us,” he continues, “Midian and Amalek, and all the children of the East, lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude, and their camels were without number as the sand by the sea-side. By yon narrow pathway he and Phurah descended in the night unto the host, and heard the dream of the Midianite concerning the barley-cake which overthrew the tent; and then they returned, encouraged, to lead the attack. It was the dead of night. All was still—thousands buried in dreamless slumber—when suddenly, on every side, trumpets sounded, torches blazed, and voices shouted, ‘The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!’ And all that startled host ran, and cried, and fled! Away they went yonder to the Jordan, every man’s sword against his fellow, and all Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh mustering to the chase! Wonderful scene!” continues the old man, waxing warm with martial enthusiasm; “singular order of battle! A

shout, a flash, a trumpet blast, and the vengeance was complete! Ah! daughter, let me whisper in thine ear, and to thine inmost soul, a thought of triumph. A greater day was there foreshadowed, which would God these old eyes might behold, when the children of Israel and the children of Judah shall be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and come up out of the land, and great shall be the day of Jezreel!"

"Is it even so, my father?" asks the profoundly attentive maiden.

"So it is written," he replies; "and though these accursed Roman towers profane every height, and her legions move every where across our soil, yet so it shall come to pass, for the zeal of the Lord of Hosts will do this."

So conversing, they turn reluctant from the noble prospect, and urge in silence their southward evening way. Falling a little behind her guide, in a voice so modulated as not to reach his ear, Mary murmurs to herself,

"Then! then shall be broken the yoke of his burden,
 And the staff of his oppressor,
 As in the day of Midian.
 For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise,
 And garments rolled in blood;
 But this shall be with burning and fuel of fire.
 For unto us—"

But here the sudden recollection of the cause of her journey flashes across her memory, and the remaining words of the sublime prophecy* die upon her tongue. And she likewise rides on in silence.

As night begins to darken round them, they approach the desired inn or caravansary, and view with pleasure its twinkling lights through the gathering gloom. It is a quadrangular building, in the interior of which a spacious court serves as the public hall of reception for man and beast. On the four sides of the square are small sleeping apartments, without furniture, without fire, without any thing save bare walls, in whose crevices travelers must search, lest a scorpion, a lizard, or other venomous reptile lurk concealed. One side of the area is appropriated to a row of camels, each attached by a slender cord to a rope running the length of the side, and to which is connected a small bell, so that the least movement in any part of the row may keep it jingling. The other side witnesses the vicious exploits of congregated mules and other beasts of burden. Different parties of travelers saunter vociferous through the remaining space, or else, in their respective cells, are engaged in cooking, supping, or repose. Thus the clatter of culinary utensils, the jar-

* Isaiah ix. 6.

gon of high voices of various dialect, Syriac, Greek, Roman, or other, joined to the barking of dogs, the cries of goats and poultry, the stamping of beasts, and the ceaseless jingle of the camels' bell, combine to produce a Babel of sounds not altogether musical to hear.

Into the middle of this din, as one accustomed to such scenes, rides the sturdy Eliezer, while Mary, closely veiled, and frightened at the uproar, follows shrinkingly behind. Directing the master of the caravansary to select a couple of apartments most remote from the tumult, the old man kindly assists his charge to alight, and leads her out of the midst to where she may prepare to seek refreshment and repose. Then returning, he supplies the beasts with provender, and prepares their own frugal meal, drawing forth all requisites from his capacious panniers. Soon they have completed their repast. The lowly mattresses are spread upon the floor. The prayer is uttered; and their voices join in chanting, with subdued and saddened melody, an ancient psalm. Then, finally, they retire to their respective apartments, and seek such slumber as the incessant hubbub from the court will permit.

With the dawn they pass onward toward the land of Samaria.

Fain would we journey with them through

these scenes, replete with moving associations and memories of past deeds; fain would we listen to their pleasant converse, filled with noble reminiscences and nobler anticipations, where, at every step, objects spring to view, around which cluster tales of more than classic charm. But we must hasten onward.

Evening finds them in the fertile bowers of Sychar. Leaving the inn, they wander forth in search of Jacob's well. Mary sits upon the verge, and gazes down into its deep waters, thinking for how many hundreds, yea, thousands of years they have been there, pure and cold as at the very moment she is about to quaff them. She recalls her ancestor, who drank thereof, and his children and flocks, and whose dust, she remembers, is reposing not far away.

In the pleasing reverie she little recks of the future. She little imagines what being shall in a few years be sitting, a houseless wanderer, upon, perhaps, the very stone she occupies, dependent on the kindness of an enemy to refresh his toil-worn spirit with that crystal wave she now is drinking. Poor short-sighted child of mortality! she walks, unconscious of coming events, among the very scenes, which seem as though they would themselves cry out in her ears with notes prophetic of sorrow.

But, happily unconscious, she reclines in the balmy evening air. Serene she leaves the spot; serene she sleeps through silent watches of the night, by angels guarded, and in the morning tranquilly follows her guide on her southward way.

In the gray light of dawn they approach the ancient sepulchres, hewn in the everlasting rocks, where have been slumbering the bones of the patriarch Joseph since the Exodus. With what reverence she treads the hallowed spot, sacred by the touching simplicity of the faith it breathes of a coming resurrection! With awe she leans her brow against the cold rock, and sighs a prayer to the God of her fathers, and her people, that soon the hour may dawn when they that sleep in the dust shall awake and sing!

And now, as they still journey on the live-long day, old Eliezer, delighted with the enthusiasm of his willing pupil, instructs her in the lore connected with every mountain, every valley, and every grove; recalling, on the very spots to which they relate, the stories of her national annals, with which from a child she has been made familiar.

The third night is spent at Bethel, where Jacob beheld the angels ascending and descend-

ing as he slept, and heard the Lord of angels speaking to him from above.

The fourth day they came in view of the Holy City, seated upon her four hills, girt with impregnable battlements, and crowned, as with a diadem of fire, by that temple whose white marble walls and vast plates of gold gleam in the noontide ray with insupportable splendor.

But not in Jerusalem, the pride of the whole earth, may she turn aside nor tarry, and evening finds her reposing in the village of Bethlehem; a spot ere long to be revisited under other auspices than she can now conjecture.

On the fifth and last evening of her weary journey, partaking the impatience of her anxious spirit, an eagerness which, having sustained her in all the unaccustomed fatigues of such a lengthened pilgrimage, grows more absorbing as she approaches to its close, let us hasten to the end, as she enters, alone and unperceived, with throbbing heart, the gates of Zacharias's mountain home.

Noiselessly she flits through porch and court to the chamber where dwells Elizabeth. Scarcely, however, has her foot passed the threshold, her eye met the eye of her cousin, and her voice pronounced the hurried "Peace be with thee!" when the matron, filled with supernatural in-

spiration, meets her advancing steps, places her hand upon the dark locks of the agitated maiden, whose turban and veil have fallen disregarded to the floor, and cries aloud,

“Blessed art thou among women! and blessed is the fruit of thy womb! And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For lo! as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy! And blessed is she that believed, for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord!”

But as she speaks thus, with holy fervor inspiring her noble countenance, Mary appears herself to become partaker in her inspiration; no longer a timid, shrinking maiden, she stands erect, with flashing eye, and the dignity of conscious royalty; her doubts all removed, her fears forgotten, and a full tide of hope and joy springing out of the deep fountains of her soul; and thus, in the untaught numbers of the national poetry, she exclaims,

“My soul doth magnify the Lord,
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior!
For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.
For behold, from henceforth all nations shall call me blessed!
For he that is mighty hath done to me great things;
And holy is his name;

And his mercy is on them that fear him,
From generation to generation.
He hath showed strength with his arm;
He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He hath put down the mighty from their seats,
And exalted them of low degree.
He hath filled the hungry with good things,
And the rich hath he sent empty away.
He hath helped his servant Israel,
In remembrance of his mercy, as he spake to our fathers,
To Abraham and his seed forever!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VISIT.

WHO would not feel a pleasure in contemplating the life of these happy individuals during the time of Mary's visit? a three months doubtless as joyful as ever were known on earth, where joy is known rarely but in anticipation; a period during which the interior of that humble cottage presents scenes to the reflecting mind of matchless interest.

There, an Oriental imagination, at once enriched and chastened by devotion, kindling with maternal anticipation, broods upon the future in a thousand wondrous visions; for, although truly devout and spiritual, yet the words of her song reveal a keen sense of the honor bestowed upon her, and of the exaltation, personal and national, it implies.

On the part of Elizabeth, there is the affection naturally felt for a kinswoman so young and lovely as Mary, and whose destiny is so highly blended with supernatural interests. On the other hand, Mary finds in her that sympathy, support, and counsel, which, in so extraordinary a crisis, must seem inexpressibly grateful.

Happy hours of holy conversation, humble worshipping, and patient thought, how peaceful is your flight! while they witness the coming down of the latter rains, behold the ripening corn wave beneath a cloudless April sky, watch the budding vine, pluck the almond and the luscious orange, descry the lowland vales, parched by the increasing heats of May, which serve only to render their mountainous abodes the scene of Spring's warm glory. Around them echo the song of the reapers, and the rustic sports of the youths and gleaning maidens, while new harvests are sowing, and June leads on the scorching heats of midsummer.

Happy hours! sacred to the mighty past, the mysterious present, the all-absorbing future! Never were such communings on earth before, nor shall be again.

Here, in this cottage, the crisis of a world is come, yea, of a universe. On them, obscure and feeble as they are, the fates of ages are now revolving. Of them prophets have spoken, and bards sung since the world began. Their personal history has been foreshown in solemn oracles centuries ago! In the archives of the oldest nation in the world they may find their own humble selves, their opening fortunes.

Amazing! to see that trembling maiden, as

she bends anxiously over the prophetic scroll, and traces in its mystic characters all but her very name, and clearly the name, and birthplace, and fortunes of her illustrious offspring. What mind was ever charmed to the study of a record by a fascination like to this? What scrutiny ever concentrated to such intensity of ardor? Let the universal craving of the human heart to lift the veil of future realities, united to the stronger instincts of maternal solicitude, give answer. Can it be conceived that they would forego one line, one word of those God-given prophecies? Zacharias, long trained in exposition, by office a teacher; Mary, of a still, and deep, but pondering heart; Elizabeth, experienced, sedate, mature?

And yet, awe-struck and humbled, methinks they find those solemn writings inexorable to many of their most earnest interrogations. Somber shades of darkest gloom here and there belt the bright glories of the future. Plaintive notes of deepest pathos wail commingled with the mightiest movings of that melodious lyre.

Yea, from out some unknown abysses of those mysterious words, seem ever and anon to burst harsh howlings of demoniac spite, venting all its rage on some sad sufferer; and from every attempt fully to resolve these discordant

intimations into one high-sounding symphony of joy, they recoil, baffled, yet fascinated, only to return to the task with increasing zest and energy; for ah! these words are words of God, spoken, as Solomon's foundation stones were laid, for all time. These harmonies sound through the diapason of eternity. These lights and shades are flung athwart the perspective of endless vistas of ages. How shall the finite faculties of this daughter of an hour achieve the conquest of the mighty whole?

Far be it then from me here even to attempt conjecturing the words they spoke, the answers they gave, the emotions they exchanged. With silent reverence I muse hereon; and as the three short months expire, behold the gentle daughter of Heli reluctantly depart toward her northern home. After scenes may perchance develop fruit of those ideas obtained by her and treasured up in this important interview.

Meanwhile, as she is leisurely proceeding northward, other scenes detain our attention at the dwelling of the priest, where not many days elapse before the birth of the angel-promised Son. Eight days after, around his hospitable board is gathered a joyous company. Mustering with mirth and high festival, all the friends and kindred are come, from far and near, to cel-

celebrate the rite of circumcision, and the naming of the child.

In garden, gallery, and court, under ancient sycamores, oaks, and cool orange groves, by old and young, the marvelous circumstances of his birth are variously discussed, and his future greatness, in the restoration of Israel to pristine splendor, sagely prognosticated. At length the initiatory rite of the covenant having been completed, all await to hear the name pronounced.

"Zachariah shall he be called," says one ancient matron to another, "to preserve the remembrance of his holy father long upon the land."

"Thou sayest well," replies the other, "since evil it were to hear no more that venerable name in our midst." And a murmur of affectionate approval rises from all the listening circle, when, to the universal dismay, Elizabeth declares,

"His name is John."

"How!" exclaim all, in astonishment, "John? when none of thy kindred are called by that name?" and murmurs of dissent are audible from all.

"Let his father then decide," responds Elizabeth, turning, with a smile, and presenting the writing tablets to the old man, as he stands placidly leaning on his staff, watching the coun-

tenances of the speakers. Seizing the pen, while an answering smile lights up his face, the father writes,

“ His name is John !”

Then, immediately, before the others can express their surprise, his tongue is loosed, and, filled with the Holy Ghost, he cries aloud,

“ Blessed be the Lord God of Israel !

For he hath visited and redeemed his people,

And hath raised up a horn of salvation for us

In the house of his servant David ;

As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets,

Which have been since the world began :

That we should be saved from our enemies,

And from the hand of all that hate us ;

To perform the mercy promised to our fathers,

And to remember his holy covenant ;

The oath which he sware to our father Abraham,

That he would grant unto us,

That we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,

In holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our
life.

And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest :

For thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his
ways,

To give knowledge of salvation unto his people,

By the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of
our God ;

Whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us,

To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,

To guide our feet into the way of peace.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE RETURN.

SLOWLY, by reason of the increasing heats, and anxiously, in prospect of what she must encounter, the delicate maiden approaches the rocky heights of Nazareth.

The consciousness of innocence and of divine protection sustains her courage, which otherwise would be too sternly tested by the approaching crisis. Those dear to her as life itself may, she is well aware, in a moment discard and doom her to a dreadful fate. Yet God will keep his word. Her son shall rise to possess his ancestral throne, she thinks, even though her eye should never see it, though her agonized heart should long first cease to beat, and her form be reposing beneath the sods of the valley.

At length she arrives, and as soon as the first moments given to affectionate greeting are over, she summons her espoused husband, and before him and her father alone, unfolds her simple narrative, and having told all, awaits in silent suspense the verdict they shall pass. The result is partly as she dreaded; for, while her fa-

ther, thoroughly persuaded of the purity and probity of his child, is ready to rejoice in the thought of her high exaltation, and thus yields credence to her narration, Joseph, on the contrary, with difficulty commanding himself, leaves her presence in a tumult of contending feelings. Never before has his sedate and settled disposition been so profoundly agitated; and there is somewhat in the agitation of a calm nature fearful to look upon. He is driven, by turns, into the extremes of hope the most glowing, of despair the most murky. He can not forget her, for such natures never do forget; neither can he fully confide in her, much less bring himself to a total unbelief—a full admission of her guilt and shame. Tenacious of his first thoughts of her, he feels as if to give them up would be to give up life itself; and, though his mind is not at rest, he can not pronounce her doom. Perceiving the unhesitating confidence of old Heli, he converses with him, endeavoring to participate in that confidence. He looks upon the clear, open brow, gazes into the mild, deep, truth-telling eye of his affianced, listens to her melodious voice, rehearsing ever such a simple, unvarying tale, and he says,

“I will not doubt!”

But once again alone, in the silent night, or

in his daily toil, and the vehement flame of jealousy kindles within his breast.

“Without unshaken trust,” at length he soliloquizes, “I can never receive her; without full proof, can never put her to open shame. What then remains but privately to give her a writing of divorce, and so shield her from the direful doom of our law?”

Thus proposing, the just-minded artisan retires to rest, and is soon buried in slumber. But lo! as he sleeps, an angel bends above his couch, effulgent with light, and, smiling benignly, says,

“Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost, and she shall bring forth a son, for thou shalt call his name Jesus, and he shall save his people from their sins.”

With what tranquil joy does the morning now bedew his troubled spirit, and with what alacrity does he arrange and adorn his humble abode.

“This! this, then,” he exclaims, “fulfills the ancient oracle, whose full meaning I have so often striven, in vain, to comprehend:

‘Behold, a virgin shall be with child,
And shall bring forth a son,
And they shall call his name EMMANUEL.’”

“Emmanuel?” he repeats, inquiringly, as if some sudden question had engaged his mind; “and why then JESUS?” and he pauses, deeply pondering. “I see! I see!” he cries, at length, a ray of joyous intelligence illumining his manly features; “all now is clear. This blessed word Emmanuel declares that this our child shall be ‘God with us;’ not with us, as of old, by pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, but with us as our PRINCE, our promised seed of David, and of Abraham, and of the promise given in Eden from the foundation of the world! And this more blessed title JESUS* declares the same sweet truth, that he that shall be born of this my virgin bride, herself of Israel’s royal line, is none other than Jehovah, Israel’s HELP against his enemies, whom the Lord hath brought upon us for our sins! He shall save us from our sins, and from our enemies, and be our Help, our horn of salvation, and our high tower! Even as it is written again,

“‘For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall

* Jehovah his help.

be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even forever.'

"Oh happy day! Oh happy man that I am! And what a wretch have I been to doubt her sacred truth! How blind, to disbelieve, not her alone, but all the holy prophets since the world began!"

So saying, in the simple language of Scripture, he taketh unto him Mary his wife, and she abideth a virgin in his dwelling until the time of the fulfillment of the prophecy.

Thus, having witnessed the birth of the great forerunner—having witnessed the state of wonder, anticipation, and uneasy yearning in which the nations were all slumbering, we have come still nearer to the Being himself whom we seek. We have formed the acquaintance of his mother. And, for my own part, I can not reflect on the character she displays, and the circumstances of its development, without deep and abiding emotion.

Nor can I fail, in reflecting on the human relationship about to be assumed, at the next step of the drama, by One who was before all time, to realize more than ever the wonderful fact that he sustained the tenderest of all the

ties of earth. I had once a mother; so have, or have had, we all. Even so, likewise, had Jehovah, our Redeemer; for I count it no more a contradiction to say that the Lord himself, as a spirit veiled in human form, sustained this blessed relation, than that my own sustains the same. If the poet's legend be not false, it was but through a gate of dreams that my spirit found its way from abroad into this sphere of existence; and so finding, found, withal, the relation of son to mother:

“ Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;
The light that rises in us, our life's star,
In other skies hath had its setting,
And cometh from afar.”

Even so the uncreated LIGHT, veiling his beams within a vase of virgin mold, rose like a morning star upon the world, all tremulous, all phosphorescent with Heaven's inner, irrepressible effulgence; and, coming from afar, shed radiance on the path of friend, and brother, and sister, and MOTHER.

It is with wonder, with awe, and with a chastened transport that I cherish this theme, as it expands and enlarges before my view. And oh! may we be led by a higher than any mere human intelligence, to see the unfolding of this mystery with the serene and spiritual

eye of faith, opening, as it were, the flood-gates of our souls to the whole tide of truth, that it may crystallize in gems on the walls of every chamber of the soul; gems which shall reflect and multiply each ray of heavenly light, until, down to the darkest caverns of thought and emotion, we become full of divine illumination.

CHAPTER X.

BETHLEHEM EPHRATAH.

DECEMBER'S blasts are sweeping across the lofty heights of Bethlehem. To the north we behold, against the wintry sky, the towers of Jerusalem. Far to the southeast the eye traverses successive descents, slope after slope, till in the distance we espy the leaden gleam of the waves of Asphaltites, and beyond them the jagged, conical, sparkling, almost transparent peaks* of the mountains of the Arabian desert.

Along the northern road, we behold, slowly approaching on foot, the figure of a sturdy traveler, staff in hand, closely wrapped in his thick gabardine, and leading by the bridle a panniered mule, and another bearing a muffled figure.

Enveloped in her large winter veil, and in various skins and coarse fabrics, rides a young female, apparently in suffering, and shrinking from the cutting northern blasts, which now begin to come loaded with snow, as they drive relentlessly along the rocky road. She seems weak, and weary, and scarcely capable of maintaining her seat without support from her com-

* Lamartine.

panion; who supports her with his ready arm from time to time, while all their apparel, and the shaggy hide of their brute companions, are soon coated with the fine driving snow and sleet, and the road becomes so slippery, that with many a slide they slowly urge their painful way.

And is this, alas! the daughter of an ancient line of kings? Is this to be the mother of a universal conqueror? Young, delicate, never exposed to many hardships, how, in this dreary journey, do the pitiless forces of wintery war, the gloom of frowning Nature, spread a pall over thy spirit in thine hour of anguish!

Soon they stand before the door of the hospitable inn, confident at last of privacy and rest. With what chagrin does Joseph learn that not a corner of the spacious edifice is unoccupied! The great census has gathered here unprecedented crowds, and they are come too late from far Galilee. Thus they stand benumbed with cold in the open high-way, poor, friendless, and unknown. In despair, he looks for some friendly face to guide him, but all are cowering around the fire. He looks here and there for some temporary shelter, if it be no better than a hut, a shed, or a hovel, but all in vain.

At length a door presents itself to his view in a neighboring hill side, affording entrance to

a species of cave or grot, such as are common in those mountain regions, and which, when additionally excavated by art, as in the present instance, are frequently fitted with a few rude articles of stable furniture. In fact, it is a stable in the rock; and thither, as a last resort, he bends his steps.

They enter; and in the farthest recess of the cave, which, though tenanted by several steeds, proves at least dry and warm, Joseph hastens to scatter straw, and spread the matting he carries in his panniers. Upon this the trembling virgin sinks, grateful for so mean a shelter, while, having cared for the mules, her husband kindles a fire, and dries their drenched garments, and makes such other arrangements for her comfort as the tenderest anxiety can suggest.

Thus it is that at last the hour approaches for the entrance upon earth of that Jehovah who made it. Can we stand beneath the rugged rocks of that low-browed cave, now wreathed in the stifling smoke, listen to the stamping of the steeds, and the sound of their teeth as they grind their food; can we see in yon dim corner the figure of the sighing and exhausted young maiden, the kneeling form of Joseph by her side; can we hear the fierce December gale howling without, and the rushing of the rain and sleet;

can we call all these circumstances about us, be fully possessed of the scene, ourselves a part of it, and then reflect that here, in this obscure retreat—this cavern, fit to be the den of fierce banditti—this somber fuliginous vault, is about to happen the greatest event in the whole annals of time! Can we stand thus at the very crisis of the mighty spiritual drama, for the enactment of which the world itself was made, and yet feel no deep and solemn adoration, no profound awe?

Yet I have heard that there be those, unhappily, who, in all the scenes we have been and are passing through, can see nothing pure, lovely, hallowed; nothing venerable, nothing divine; nothing even enchanting to the mere imaginative sense of poetical beauty; men whose souls are so dead to any genuine emotions of purity, so devoid of any true greatness of feeling, any devout magnanimity; men so dried, shriveled, and barren in a parched and sterile intellectual acuteness; men so destitute of creative imagination, or any glimmering perception of what is truly noble and exalted, and, finally, so virulent in the spleen of their small natures, that they can not approach into the sanctuary of earth's most solemn, most tremendous scenes, without recoiling in trepidation from the uncongenial place.

It is not for such men that I ever feel sen-

timents either of fear or of respect. I breathe another atmosphere, inhabit a different world. Their profane babblings can neither beguile my intellect nor defile my heart. And I pray to the Author of all light, love, and beauty, that if any are to be so miserable as to be unable to see glory where it shines, truth where it radiates, love where it beams, beauty where it dazzles; any who by their very nature are condemned to denial, unbelief, sneering, and woe, I, at least, may be permitted evermore to gaze unblinded upon the central illumination of all worlds, and breathe exultingly the pure air of belief, love, and humble joy.

How often have we all, doubtless, with wondering curiosity, brooded over those hidden years of the incarnation, preceding the public ministry of the Being now approaching to view. As a star here and there in a dark night looks kindly out from the gloom of the overcast heavens, speaking of the universe beyond, and assisting our faith to realize its glories, though shrouded in darkness, so, from the canopy of those thirty years, look kindly forth to meet our gaze a few dispersed star-beams of the heaven-inspired Gospel.

What, then, is the first personal dawning upon us of this Being whose name is "Wonder-

ful?" What attitude does he assume? Where do we first behold him? The answer is in those simple, remarkable words,

"WRAPPED IN SWADDLING CLOTHES, AND LYING IN A MANGER."

The careless menial of the haughty Roman plies his evening toil, and passing from charger to charger, providing for the wants of the war-like steeds, glances occasionally, with transient curiosity, upon Thy sleeping form. No rays of heavenly effulgence circling round thy brow reveal the presence of a God. The distant songs of angel choirs reach not his ear. There thou liest in thy first earthly slumber, weak, helpless, and visibly the mere offspring of a despicable Jew. So he thinks: Let him pass on with his thoughts and labors, little wotting that before the name of that child the throne of Cæsar must go down, the Eternal City sink in fire.

But near thy side, vigilant of thy slumber, reclines now a maiden, young, and pale, and of a deep heart. Who shall fathom the thoughts of her breast, who divine its emotions, as now, a virgin mother, Mary gazes on thee, thou sleeping babe? Are not the voices of angel messengers yet ringing in her ears? Feels she not the overwhelming influence of the Almighty Father? and, as the silent fountains of a moth-

er's love are first unloosed, how do their waters gush forth, only to mingle with the ocean of love that rolls shoreless through the bosom of the Eternal!

There, too, lies buried in sleep the over-weary artisan, seizing at length the first hour of quiet for repose, his manly visage, in the ruddy light of the flickering fire, marked with calm and resolute integrity.

Wonderful group! Methinks I could never weary of this humble grotto, these mysterious guests. Fain would I tarry with them and make one of their number, would watch their rising and their sitting, their going out and coming in, their sleeping and their waking. I would interpret the meaning of those expressive glances, and treasure up the few low words which hearts so overburdened may speak. No longer should they remain pale, shadowy ghosts of beings, flitting in memory's uncertain twilight above some shapeless portion of the world called Palestine; but I would force them to seem to me indeed human; for me, as for them, should the sun arise behind the Arabian mountains, and quench his beams in the broad Mediterranean. With them would I eat and drink, hunger and thirst, labor and grow weary.

Doubtless an infant's feeble wail oft smites

upon the ear of night in that reverberating cell, and there, like angel warbling, rises in the night-watches the soft cradle hymn of the wakeful Mary, soothing in that artless voice, that wild and ancient language, the slumbers of a God.

Night at length wanes over the inmates of this humble cave. The hum of business has not yet commenced, the raging blast has died into silence, and, in the east, pale Phosphorus alone declares the orient day, his tremulous beams sparkling every where upon the snow, which lies like a silvery mantle upon the gloomy pines and evergreens that crest the slumbering mountains.

Yet, in this hour, when deep sleep falleth upon men, the tramp of feet is heard, and voices break the stillness of the night. Mary, roused from a moment's oblivion, starts toward her child, and looks forth with sudden alarm, while Joseph cautiously removes from the mouth of the cave the rude and heavy door.

A flood of torch-light streams in upon the dazzled eye of Mary, now used to the darkness, and with increased tremor she beholds her unexpected visitors. A nomad shepherd, in red tunic and white turban, stalks forward, poniard and sword at his belt, quiver and bow upon his

shoulder, and in his hand a torch and a long spear. After him troop a horde of rugged followers in pastoral garb, some armed, some bearing only shepherds' crooks, and some with torches.

Before Mary can find courage to utter a word, lo! every knee is bent, and every forehead bowed to the ground; when, rising from this posture of adoration before the sleeping infant, the aged shepherd with a snowy beard thus speaks:

“We were abiding in the fields, keeping watch over our flocks by night, and lo! the angel of the Lord came upon us, and the glory of the Lord shone round about us, and we were sore afraid! And the angel said unto us, ‘Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord; and this shall be a sign unto you, ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying,

“‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace,
Good will toward men!’

And it came to pass that, when the angel was gone away from us into heaven, we said one to

another, 'Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which the Lord hath now made known unto us.' Now, therefore, will we return, glorifying and praising God for all the things we have seen, even as they were told unto us."

So saying, they reverently depart, and the cave is dark once more, and its inmates see outside, upon the snow, the star-light, now growing wan before the luster of the dawn.

Can not we all see with what emotion the youthful Mary looks first upon her silent husband, and next upon the now awakening boy?

"Is this helpless infant," thinks she, "now lying in my arms, one day to sit upon a golden throne, blazing with jewels, with a scepter in his hand, and a crown of diamonds on his head? Shall this weak and wailing voice ever be heard above the din of battle, louder than the clangor of the trumpets, and the shouting of the captains? Shall these tiny fingers one day grasp a cimeter red with carnage?"

Ah, woman! that tiny hand shall bear no curved cimeter, but thou shalt see it mangled by the driven nail! that head shall indeed wear a crown, but—of thorns!

CHAPTER XI.

THE PROPHECY.

THE winter wears tranquilly past, and Mary, according to custom, remains closely concealed for forty days; but, as these approach their close, she must needs visit the Temple to offer sacrifice for her own ceremonial purification and for the redemption of her first-born. We behold them, therefore, journeying as before, Joseph leading the way, and drawing nigh to the Holy City. Their hearts expand with the purity and brightness of the vernal scene, and they beguile the way with many an ancient psalm; while close to her bosom Mary presses her sleeping child, and wonders at the happiness she feels.

A chariot thunders by, preceded by a score of spearmen, with burnished armor, waving plume, and glancing shield. A few casual glances are wasted on the tardy family of Joseph, and in a minute the cavalcade whirls out of sight. Pass on, proud Roman! thou leavest a greater king than Cæsar behind thee, one even of those "miserable Jews!"

As now they begin to wind to the left, through the vale of Hinnom, with palpitating bosoms and low voices they sing,

“Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness!” And a mountain indeed rises, lofty and crowned with splendor, before them.

“Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great king! Walk about Zion, and go round about her; tell the towers thereof; mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces!”

“We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in.”

“Cry out and shout, oh inhabitant of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee!”

Thus, from out the stores of their retentive memories, from childhood imbued with knowledge of the ancient Word, they rehearse responsive strains of jubilee and glory.

Thus they draw nigh that degenerate city, unworthy of the lowly guest now approaching her walls, filled with tyranny, concupiscence,

and self-righteousness, governed by Rome's bloody vassal, Idumean Herod. Did no thought of this, and of the impending future, mar the triumph of their song? Did no fatal forebodings rise? Did no voice whisper in their souls an oracle out of olden scrolls, "Jerusalem shall become heaps; and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest?"

Did Mary look unhesitatingly down upon the placid features of her child, and think, "Yet a few years, and thou, my son, shalt possess these stupendous bulwarks, and the Lord shall give unto thee the throne of thy father David; yea, the diadem, the crown, so long removed, so trebly overturned, the Lord will give to thee whose right it is?" And yet, as they come up by the western wall to the entering of the Bethlehem Gate, what waste and barren hill stands just before them, staring them gloomily in the face? That sullen mound is Calvary!

They scarcely see it; but, leaving it all ominous there upon the left, pass eastward through the gate, and along that road that leads to the Temple; a mournful road, to be called, in after generations, *Via Dolorosa*; for why?—this little one, who is now carried so tenderly in a mother's arms for the first time over its stones, shall, in a few years, stagger back over it, un-

der the fatal cross, followed by this mother weeping, amid the howlings of a mob.

Unconscious, however, of this, they arrive in the spacious area at the base of the great stairway leading up to those dizzy heights; for the square side of Mount Moriah spreads her beveled masonry up before them, surmounted by the outer temple-parapet.

A little to the right, and almost over their very heads, springs the first of a series of mighty arches, spanning the Tyropoëon, and abutting upon Mount Zion. There, full many a score fathom in the air, seem almost to float those massive stones, as if of feathery lightness, by reason of the symmetrical proportions of the gigantic whole, whereon have beat the storms of ten centuries unheeded.*

* Speaking of ruins still visible, a modern writer says: "Can it be doubted, then, that this was the site of the viaduct mentioned by Josephus? And it is just where we should, on grounds of probability, expect to find them, if any where, that we discover the huge commencements of an arch; an arch which, if its curve be calculated with an approximation to the truth, would measure sixty feet, and must have been one of five sustaining the viaduct (allowing for the abutments on either side) in running from side to side of the Tyropoëon.

"The piers supporting the center arch of this bridge must have been of great altitude, not less, perhaps, than one hundred and thirty feet; and the whole structure, when seen from the southern extremity of the Tyropoëon, must have had an aspect of grandeur, especially as connected with the lofty and

Little do they comprehend that these stupendous structures, apparently transcending human power to erect, or to remove, or even to disturb, are written to come down and be leveled with the dust, and in after ages speak out of the ground to the stranger from far-distant shores, as with wizard whisper, calling low from out the dust.*

On the contrary, as they go up the broad marble steps, we hear them chanting in suppressed voices,

“And the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts, and in this place will I give peace!”

Arriving in the outer court, they travel leisurely round, beneath the magnificent southern portico. Corinthian columns of white marble support a roof of cedar, more than a hundred feet above their heads; columns so vast that three men in vain would try to clasp them, and so far apart that ranks of infantry might march between.

sumptuous edifices of the Temple and of Zion, to the right and to the left.”—*Traill's Josephus*, vol. i., p. 29.

* *Isaiah*, xxix., 4.

Beneath this noble ceiling, in this forest of marble shafts, they walk slowly round to the east side, and approach the stalls of those who furnish victims for the sacrifices and other articles of merchandise. Purchasing a pair of turtle-doves, Joseph places them, fluttering, in the hands of Mary, who soothes them in her bosom. Leaving now the outer court, they enter that of the women, through the gate called Beautiful, and crossing, ascend the fifteen steps conducting to the court of Israel, by the gate Nicanor.

Here they are met by the white-robed, mitred priest, who comes from the interior of the priests' court, and receives from the trembling virgin one of the glossy victims.

Bearing this in to the foot of the great brazen altar, he wrings off its head, and sprinkles its blood upon the side of the altar, and the rest of the blood he wrings out into the trench for that purpose, extending all around the altar's base. This is the sin offering.

Then returning, the priest receives the second victim at her hand, and, ascending from the left, or southern side, by an inclined plane of fifty feet in length, bears it toward the altar. Arriving at the top, he wrings off the head of this likewise, and casts it far upon the spacious

area of the hearth, into the flame that never dies, but is kept forever burning from age to age. The blood of this, as of the other, he wrings from above into the trench below; then, plucking away the crop, with its contents, he casts it (passing by a ledge along the eastern side to the northern verge) down upon the place of the ashes. Then returning to the southern side, and taking a sacrificial knife, he cleaves the bird across the wings, yet without entirely dividing it, and casts it thus upon the hearth into the flames. This is the burnt sacrifice.

Then again returning, he receives from the hand of Joseph five small coins for the redemption of the first-born.

It is when these solemn ceremonies are completed, whose mystic import that agitated mother can scarce fathom, that through her veil she espies an aged man approaching, not of sacerdotal vesture, but venerable in mien, and filled with the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

He draws nigh the spot she occupies, apparently obeying a resistless impulse from some unseen power, and with a fire of exalted enthusiasm flashing in his eye. Taking from Mary's arms the child, and raising his eyes to heaven, he exclaims,

“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart

in peace, according to thy word, since mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel!"

Coming then still closer to her side, he adds, in a lower tone, and fixing his meaning glance upon her,

"For this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed; yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also!"

Forth from among the by-standers totters now an aged matron, whom once before we met in the city streets, after the vision of the ministering Zacharias; and who, from that day, has taken up her abode in one of the numerous chambers in the interior of this vast fane, in order that, with prayer and fasting by night and day, she might await the coming of her Redeemer.

Now, with trembling voice and streaming eye, she renders thanks to God; and, laying hands upon the infant's head, testifies to all around that this is he who shall save them from their sins.

"This," she cries, "is he that is to be ruler

in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, even from everlasting. Therefore he gave them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth"—and as she speaks, the holy Anna bends her glance upon the virgin—"then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand and rule in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God, and they shall abide, for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth! And he will assemble her that halteth, and gather her that is driven out, and he shall make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation, and he shall reign over them in Mount Zion from henceforth even forever. And thou, oh tower of the flock, the strong-hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem!"

With difficulty extricating their child from the blessings, the tears of joy, the kindly hands of those whom these events have drawn to the spot, Mary and Joseph prepare to withdraw; and, followed by the wondering crowd, they escape from the Temple, overcome with their emotions. Amid whisperings, and blessings, and suppressed inquiries or open congratulations,

they descend, and in a few moments Mary is reposing in a pleasant apartment of a retired inn.

Her thoughts I strive incessantly to picture to myself, as, her husband being for a few moments absent, and mother and child left alone, she lays him on the lowly mattress by her side. She bends over him, intently gazing on his face, now veiled by those tresses of hers, which, escaping from their confinement, lie glistening on his pillow. Oh, could we see the changing expressions of her countenance! What deep and absorbing scrutiny is this she directs upon her child? Is there some dark and hidden mystery about him which she can not penetrate? Does it begin faintly to glimmer on her soul that worldly renown is not, can not be all that awaits his coming career? What means that just uttered ominous declaration, "A sign that shall be spoken against; yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also?"

"Oh, my God!" methinks I hear her pray, "what is the fate that overhangs my child? What dirge is this ever and anon ringing in my ear, '*He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; he was cut off from the land of the living?*' and why can not I shut it out? What is the whole mystery whose meaning my weak mother's-heart can not grasp?"

And the tears drop like a baptism of love upon the calm brow of the infant.

“Instruct me, O Almighty Father! and develop in me these undefined and impalpable glimmerings of a future destiny, which spring up from time to time, and which I strive in vain to reduce to order and consistency. And oh! give grace unto thine handmaid in all things to obey the will of Heaven, trusting to the end thy love in every hour of trial that may impend!”

Such must be some of the thoughts of this youthful and lovely being, hemmed in as she is by the movements of unseen agents, overborne as she feels herself by the revolving tide of unknown influences, which are all finding their center, their vortex, so near to her terrified, her fragile form; thoughts which, yet unable to express, she is constrained to smother in her breast, and devoutly cherish there.

And all this while, in reproducing her so vividly to my view as almost to forget that she and her slumbering babe are not a real presence, I confess that I can not look upon them without trembling sympathy. While I behold him lying there in the perfect, motionless beauty of an infant's slumber; while I trace the blue veins in his forehead, and mark the rare delicacy of

each feature; while I hear his soft breathing, and see the embroidered robe he wears rising and falling as he breathes; while seeing these things, I reflect what song has been singing for ages in a vast rolling flood of prophetic melody concerning this very infant; when I think what Spirit it is, veiled beneath that fragile form; when I dare glance my thoughts a moment into that measureless abyss of darkness and demoniac mastery just ready to yawn beneath him, I am lost in amazement, in pity, and in awe! I acknowledge, in disguise before me, the presence of my Creator, my Redeemer, and my friend.

And as to this trembling mother, I can but tremble for her. She can not foresee a step; and each hour brings with it some unexpected development, so contrary to her preconceived opinions, that she feels unsettled, agitated, lost. There is evidently some vast Maelstrom of events moving about, and upon its outmost limit she sees herself borne slowly round; but she is startled, when she tries to find the center of the mighty gyre, to behold a dim scene of dark, tempestuous waters angrily careering round, half concealed by black and ominous clouds that hang above, while down the green, gloomy, fire-crested slope she knows herself insensibly con-

verging ; and while, from its murky tunnel, out of viewless chambers of the nether world, come ever and anon those mocking sounds of goblin wrath and revelry, it seems as if all fiendish legions were waiting their hour and the power of darkness. Yet here and there upon the shore she sees full many a landmark, and behind the clouds that overhang the scene a bow of dazzling glory ; and, herself a mote upon the deep, she can but look upward and cry, " God is our refuge and strength ! a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be cast into the depths of the sea. Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her ; she shall not be moved. God shall help her, and that right early !"

CHAPTER XII.

THE MAGI.

THE quiet of a warm February afternoon has settled over the sacred hill of Moriah, and within all the spacious courts scarce a murmur can be heard. The white-stoled order of Levi are withdrawn to their apartments, except a few who glide noiselessly about the sacred sanctuary.

The outer court exhibits few occupants, save here and there a turbaned head leaning against a vast column, or a few, clustered near the stalls, of those who profaned the place of prayer by gainful traffic; and the silence of these solemn solitudes is unbroken, save by the twittering of the swallows who pursue their mazy flight above the gilded pinnacles and between the lofty columns.

Standing within the eastern threshold, beneath a massy lintel a hundred feet above, we look forth through a gateway whose ponderous leaves, spread wide, might admit a bannered host. Cedron's foaming torrent, swollen by the winter rains, winds through the vale beneath us, seeming at such a depth a shining, silvery rill.

While we are gazing down, lost in wonder

at the magnificence of all around us, what singular company of men is that we espy? Every one of them, as they stand upon the glittering marble, is in apparel black as jet, with flowing silken caftan girt about his loins, and on his head a high square cap of precious fur. As they draw nearer in their slow ascent, we perceive in every net-work girdle a scroll and a silver writing-case. Their entire demeanor is dignified and lofty, and their white beards, descending to their breast, and their high and massive foreheads, whereon occult research and patient thought have drawn many a line, impress the beholder with respect.

Reverently they enter this celebrated fane, whose magnificence is known through all the East. Unconscious of the curiosity they excite, they advance to the gate of the second court, and are about to ascend, when lo! the fierce visages and threatening gestures of the bystanders warn them to desist, and draw their attention to the inscription by the wall, which declares that no Gentile may penetrate further these sacred inclosures, upon pain of death.

But now some of the sons of Aaron, perceiving these unusual visitors, descend from the interior through the gate Nicanor, and, crossing the court of the women, confront with their

white linen tunics these black-robed worshipers of fire.

Bowing in Oriental courtesy to the variegated pavement of mosaic work, "Tell us," exclaim the sages, "ye servants of God most high, where is he that is born KING OF THE JEWS, for we have seen his star in the East, and are come to worship him?"

Ah, what a moment! and what thrilling vibrations must have struck through every heart! A year ago, and Gabriel's voice had proclaimed within yonder consecrated recess the truth of his forerunning messenger; but yesterday a maiden stood on yonder steps with a mysterious child, and the voices of hoary Simeon and of Anna proclaimed to all the presence of Israel's Redeemer and King; and now, in quick succession, comes upon the sacerdotal ear a testimony utterly unprecedented, of pagan astrologers, out of foreign climes, speaking of a star, demanding the Jewish monarch, and proffering homage!

Without attempting to conjecture the answer of the now rapidly assembling priesthood, nor their solemn communings with these heaven-sent guests, pass we at once to where, not far remote from the Temple, in the midst of sumptuous gardens and artificial bowers, a palace stands in lordly state.

Through the stern military guard that beset every approach, gliding unseen, we enter a spacious hall adorned with ivory, gems, and gold, upon whose vermilion-tinted walls hangs many a rare production of the Grecian pencil, and all whose splendid tapestries, cushions, and rich carpets bespeak the wealth of Ormus or of Ind.

Walking irregularly to and fro, we behold a man still of noble figure, though far past the meridian of life. His frame, though large, is agile, and so knit together as to be capable of great endurance. His tunic of Tyrian purple, and the ruby that blazes in his turban, disclose his princely rank. Upon his face passion has plowed deep furrows. In his malign eye sleeps a deadly ferocity, which, if but waked, might sparkle sulphurous fires. In the twisted lines of brow and lip lurk all the serpents of cunning; while upon the remaining features are stamped the tokens of a keenly voluptuous, sensitive soul. Every gesture rapid, every motion prompt, bespeak the soldier and the man of action. Finally, the large, protuberant, but not lofty brow, proclaims the shrewd thinker, the instinctive reader of mankind. And this is Herod the Great.

At the present moment some bodily pain or mental agony is on him, for he writhes as if in

misery, and his brow is flushed. Is the shadow of impending doom dark upon his guilty soul? Does not man's guilt, in ripening, grow prophetic? Or do pale shadows of his victims rise to haunt his solitude? Perchance there come his murdered sons, a ghastly spectacle; perchance the shade of the lovely Mariamne, once so dear, so madly done to death, so remorsefully remembered! Yea, perhaps she points at her slaughtered children, and beckons him with airy hand! And to these sad phantoms are addressed, perhaps, those harsh and incoherent ravings that seem uttered from the depths of his tortured being.

Softly the door revolves, and the crafty Antipater bends before him, veiling parricidal plottings beneath a cloak of profound dissimulation and filial-seeming reverence.

"Slave!" exclaims the tyrant, whom not even a kinsman can approach without eliciting sparks of native ferocity, "what makest thou here?"

"Tidings, my lord, O king! tidings of the birth of the *King of the Jews*," replies the son, with his blandest tones.

"Ha! sayest thou?" thunders the other, striding wrathfully toward him with a menacing gesture; but, suddenly checking himself,

his bearing alters, and in a tone of equal blandness he replies, "Antipater, my son, wherefore this unseemly jesting? Rude boy, to vent thy merry humor on thine aged and indulgent sire!"

"'Tis no jest, my royal father," replies the other, assuming a tone of earnest seriousness. "A band of Eastern sages, worshipers of the sacred fire, disciples of Zoroaster, are standing now in yonder temple, in close communing with those mitred hypocrites, demanding 'where is he that is born King of the Jews?' and prating of a star which led them hither."

"Ha! is it even so? And this new tale will spread among the populace like that of driveling Zacharias some twelve months since."

"My father," is the quick reply, "I hastened hither at the first word, and yet the marvel is proclaimed upon the house tops! Nay, I heard strange whisperings of a child that was brought thither only of yesterday, and of high prophesyings that were had upon him by some notorious fanatics. All Jerusalem is moved withal, and ringing from side to side!"

A pause ensues. Lost in deep thought, Herod stands motionless, his hand instinctively clutching the jeweled hilt of a poniard in his girdle.

"This may prove serious," he exclaims, at

length, with calmness. "This new prodigy, with all their oracles, and rumors, and legends—this must needs be looked after."

"The King Messiah, say the doctors of the law, shall be revealed in the land of Galilee," responds the son, "and by a star in the East. When the Messiah shall be revealed, say they, there shall rise up in the East a certain star, flaming with various colors."

"Ay?" answers the king, inquiringly; "and this, then, is to be their sufficient warrant for rebellion and insurrection?"

"Such is the legend," rejoins Antipater. "The plague, famine, and want must chastise the land; earthquakes shake down cities; Jerusalem herself—some gloomy seers go so far as to say—even the mountain of the house, shall become heaps; wars shall arise, universal revolt and rebellion ensue, and, finally, the son of David shall restore the kingdom to Israel, and the sleeping saints arise!"

"And are these sayings bruited abroad?" inquires the monarch, gloomily.

"By many," is the reply, "they are boldly avowed, but most whisper them discreetly and cautiously in secret."

Another pause ensues, of deep deliberation. "Go," the king at length replies, "gather to-

gether the leaders of the people, and bring them hither." And Antipater vanishes.

Anon, in solemn procession, enter all the chief priests, and scribes, and doctors, and, after feigned ceremonial of loyalty, await the tyrant's pleasure.

"Reverend rabbis, declare to me, I pray you," the king, with well-feigned courtesy and respect, begins, "where, think ye, shall Messiah the Prince be born?"

At this, those hoary fathers look upon each other dubiously and hesitating, until, at length, their eyes, as by mutual consent, turn upon one of their number, of great age and profound attainments. Plucking from his bosom a roll of parchment, the venerable Hillel replies,

"In Bethlehem of Judea shall our Redeemer be born, O king! as I was but now reflecting when thy summons came. Hearing somewhat of the mission of yon Eastern sages, I bethought me of the words of holy Micah," and, as he speaks, unrolling the scroll, he reads, "'And thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, even from everlasting!'"

"And is this all?" inquires the king. "Saith not the holy prophet aught beside?"

“My lord, O king!” responds the sage, “he doth. ‘Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she that travaileth hath brought forth; then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and they shall abide; for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.’”

“Thanks, venerable father!” replies the monarch. Then, whispering aside to the vigilant Antipater, “Depart,” he says, “and search out secretly these magi, and bring them hither.” Then, raising his voice, he asks,

“One thing further I would learn of thee, most learned Hillel: what is that ‘remnant’ the prophet speaketh of, and wherefore saith he they are ‘given up until she which travaileth hath brought forth?’”

“It is well known to my lord the king,” replies Hillel, “that these words of Micah were scarcely uttered when Shalmaneser took the ten tribes of Israel and carried them into captivity, where they remain to this day. Now it is to the reunion of these with Judah that the prophet here doubtless refers, in a style whereof the event alone can fully reveal the minute import; and this I humbly judge by reason of

a sentence immediately preceding, if my lord the king shall vouchsafe to hear."

"Read, read, holy father!" exclaims the king. "I am profoundly attentive."

"If it please your majesty, then," continues the sage, "the prophet saith before, 'In that day,' that is, the day of Messiah, 'saith the Lord, I will assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted; and I will make her that halted a remnant,' that is, Judah, 'and her that was cast far off a strong nation,' that is, Israel; 'and the Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion from henceforth even forever.'"

"And wherefore," interrupts the monarch, "deem ye not this oracle already accomplished? Is not the Lord your king this very day, and ye restored to your city and to your land?"

"Let not the anger of my lord the king wax hot against his servant," replies the doctor, "and I will add to read yet another word; for my lord the king doth know that since the days of profane Zedekiah, who died in Babylon, no seed of David hath sat upon the throne of David; yet what saith the prophet: 'And thou, O tower of the flock! the strong-hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the *first dominion*;' that is, if it please the king,

as the Lord sware unto David that he should never want a man to sit upon his throne, so the prophet here limiteth the captivity of the ten tribes by the birth of that promised seed, whose right—”

But here the brow of Herod grows dark with wrath, and his cheek livid, and his eye, blood-shot and glaring, darts glances of ominous rage.

“Hence, thou prating owl! thou driveling, maudlin idiot! Comest thou here to insult the royal throne with thy treasonous oracles, thy lying legends? Hence! avaunt! with all thy priestly crew, lest I let loose upon thee them that will not spare for gray hairs and sanctimonious apparel.”

And as he thus hurls almost inarticulate oburgations forth, foaming at the mouth, and striding to and fro, he seems like some wild beast of prey just ravening on the flock. They, with pallid cheeks and trembling limbs, fly unceremoniously, and in precipitate disarray, from the apartment, and seek their homes, praising God that their lives are spared.

Herod's passion gradually subsides in moody musings as he awaits the summoned magi.

“Ah!” he mutters, in disconnected soliloquy, “this is no child's play. The ground reels. A chasm yawns deep as hell. My brain grows

giddy. Jerusalem ringing with the tale! Old and young, priest and people, open or in secret, all on fire! An angel! a prophet! a mysterious child! and pilgrim magicians! This inflammable populace! tow, kindling at a spark! Vermin! fanged reptiles! they hate me; they would swarm upon me—would gnaw my vitals. And who loves me? ah! hush! enough of that. Away, ye—Antipater? bland, perfidious; there's murder in every subtle smile; yea, murder! But I will reckon with him. His turn shall come! And these old fables, legends, oracles—PROPHECIES shall I call them? Ah! if that were credible!" And the tyrant pauses, buried in profound abstraction. "They do most marvelously cohere, and fall out together! Can it be? Hath Jehovah spoken? And what, then, were I? Where my scepter? What the end? Messiah? *King*? and OF THE JEWS? There's a knell in every syllable! It must not, shall not be! And yet that *star*! Be the prophets true or false—be that babe Messiah or be he not—I will—" and a ferocious expression settles darkly across his sinister visage, and his hand strains convulsively the hilt of his dagger, half drawing, and thrusting it forcibly back again. "Is it not written," hisses forth from his clenched teeth, "have not I heard it some-

where read, 'Messiah shall be cut off?' Be, then, the oracle accomplished! That vision, at least, shall not lie!"

At this juncture the magi enter the apartment, marshaled by the wily Antipater. Behold now these noble strangers confronted with the fierce Edomite. How eagerly he communes with them, with difficulty dissembling the ferocious purposes within. Contrast his virulent soul with theirs. How calm they stand there before him, secure in the monitions of Heaven. They have seen a star—the star that should rise out of Jacob. They are come to seek the scepter that should come out of Israel.

Far in their Eastern realms, buried in their uncouth lore, they felt the lapse of an ancient cycle, they acknowledged the circling round of a new. A mysterious power hath raised them out of their obscurity in these ages, dashed them once upon the historic stream, and they vanish in the next curling wave of oblivion. But one cry of theirs echoes across the misty ocean of time, and that cry is "*A King!* A KING! We have seen his star, and are come to worship!"

Herod, on the contrary, fierce, scoffing, truculent, yet secretly alarmed at their testimony and their presence, cloaks his nefarious designs under the veil of hypocritical devotion.

“Wherefore, oh hoary philosophers and astrologers of the East, bend ye your steps to this foreign realm? Whom seek ye? or what? And by what strange spell were ye so summoned?”

Advancing a step from his companions, the chief of the magi, bowing low, replies, “My lord, O king! be it known to thee, that, from most ancient times, our fathers have spoken of a coming age of universal peace and prosperity. Through the far East they have spread the saying that a star and scepter must arise out of Judea. And what is written by the holy Zoroaster? ‘In the last time shall appear one who shall be called the man of the world, who shall adorn the earth with religion and righteousness; in whose time rest and peace shall prevail, all dissensions cease, all grievancy be done away.’ This, may it please the king, is he whom we came to seek.”

“And wherefore,” answers Herod, “came ye now? How knew ye this to be the appointed time?”

“Throughout the world, O king,” replies the sage, “the rumor hath sounded far and wide, that it is contained in the books of the fates, in mystic numbers, handed down from former generations, that about this time some must come out of Judea to obtain the empire of the world.

Deeply pondering on such universal anticipations, and brooding over the estate of kingdoms and of all religions, our minds were irresistibly impelled to watch for every sign or signal of impending change; and when, in the depth of the divine night, we beheld, rising from our western horizon, and hanging over the region of Judea, an effulgent orb of lucid beams, seeming, as it were, to waver and beckon us onward, it was borne in upon our souls that this was Heaven's call, and this the star of which our fathers have spoken; and we said one to another, 'Let us arise, and go unto Judea, inquiring for him that is born King of the Jews, for we have seen his star, and are come to worship him!'"

"And when, oh hoary pilgrims," asks the eager tyrant, "when beheld ye this portent?"

"Yesterday," replies the magian, "was the fortieth day since its first rising."

"Yesterday!" exclaims the monarch, now changing color, and exchanging rapid glances with Antipater; "and yesterday it was that child was brought to yonder temple, to be redeemed, according to the law, at its fortieth day!"

"And where, then, O king," demands the sage, becoming questioner in turn, "where was this infant born?"

"Nay," replies the king, "we know not; unless, as the rabbis declare is written in their prophets, in Bethlehem here, a few leagues to the south."

At this, smiles and gleams of joy light up the anxious visages of those venerable men, and they seem hasting to depart.

"Go ye, then," commands the monarch, with a favoring smile, "search diligently for the young child, and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also!" He has discovered the age, the birth-place, he needs further but to identify the person of his contemplated victim; and, deceived by his fair guise, the sages depart rejoicing.

"Were it not best," is the cautious inquiry of Antipater, "to send some emissary, who can perform more surely the worship thou, O king, spakest of but now?"

"Nay," replies Herod, "let them return, and we will then conduct in proper person those rites of adoration the *King of the Jews* must needs receive at our hands." And at this, both father and son smile in dark derision.

While such meshes are being woven, as it were, around her very path, and threatening instantly to entangle her in their fatal toils,

Mary, all unconscious, with her babe and her husband, has stolen quietly away, and, unperceived, has passed the gloomy, guarded battlements of the western gate. Little did those myrmidons suspect the interest attached to those humble travelers, when they allowed them unquestioned egress. Far different would have been their demeanor had but the tyrant's order—to let no persons of such description pass, and offering golden guerdon to him who should arrest such fugitives—arrived a few hours earlier. Brief, then, had been their history. Like a tiger leaping on his prey, those ruthless ministers of tyranny would have pounced upon them, and the mother have seen her babe the next moment in the hands of one that never knew pity, when ambition bade him strike.

Alike unsuspecting and unsuspected, they go out, however, ere the tyrant's suspicions arrive at such defined shape as to cause the order to be sent to every gate for the detection of any passengers such as had been present in the temple; and thus they precede by but a few hours the steps of the searching magi.

They are already safely housed in a retired cottage in Bethlehem, previously provided by the artisan against their return. The mother now sits watchful, in the gathering evening

shades, breathing to an ancient melody the soothing numbers of her cradle-hymn :

“He will not suffer thy foot to be moved :
He that keepeth thee will not slumber.
Behold, he that keepeth Israel
Shall neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord is thy keeper :
The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand.
The sun shall not smite thee by day,
Nor the moon by—”

But here, with a slight shriek; she ceases her song, and clasps her child to her breast. A sudden rushing is heard; as of the passage of a meteoric body. The doors fly open. On all sides a ruddy glare is pouring; and in the red light, a band of weird pilgrims, tall, dark-gowned, and mystical, appear, from the folds of their robes plucking, as they come, caskets of sparkling jewels and royal treasures. At the astounded maiden's feet fall gold and gems, frankincense and myrrh, while, in Oriental homage, each spacious forehead smites the dust.

“This child,” exclaims the chief magian, placing his hand upon the infant's head, “O woman, shall be a king! From the hills of the east hath God sent us to adore one born King of the Jews, and this is he! And thou, O royal babe! blessings of the Almighty Spirit that dwelleth in the inaccessible flame, blessings of

all starry influences, blessings of the seven spirits before the throne, be forever on thy sacred head!"

They are gone. The room is empty and silent, till Joseph lights in haste the nightly lamp. Here lieth the child, almost enveloped in glittering treasure. Here the mother, flushed with excitement, scarce knowing what she does, wreathes him with strings of pearls, while Joseph gazes upon the whole like one in a dream.

"Arise! shine!" at length he exclaims, "for thy light is come,
 And the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee!
 And the Gentiles shall come to thy light,
 And kings to the brightness of thy rising.
 Lift up thine eyes round about, and see!
 All they gather themselves together, they come unto thee.
 The wealth of the Gentiles shall come unto thee:
 All they from Seba shall come.
 They shall bring gold and incense;
 They shall show forth the praises of the Lord."

Thus they commune together, rejoicing and praising God, until deep night settles around them. Thus they retire, and sink at length into slumber, little conjecturing their ominous awaking. A voice breaks silence in the dead of night by their bedside, in tones of warning:

"Arise! take the young child, with Mary his mother, and flee into Egypt! and be thou there until I bring thee word; for HEROD will seek the young child's life to destroy him."

Ah, fearful reverse of their exalted anticipations! The terrified mother seems already to hear the tramp of approaching soldiery, and every rustling leaf creates a tremor in her agitated breast.

“Fly! fly!” I hear her gentle voice exclaiming. “Let us fly at once, before the murderous messengers are upon us.”

Then is there sudden commotion in that midnight chamber. They hastily don their attire. They gather a small store. They secrete the treasures opportunely furnished by the magi; and, when all is ready, Joseph proceeds to prepare the means of speedy conveyance. All is still. She hears each breath of the yet slumbering infant, every note of the nightly cricket. Moments seem hours. Through the lattice she beholds the pale moon, just sinking to the horizon, and bids her haste her departure, and leave the earth in gloom. And when from without she hears the signal, flitting noiselessly forth, in a few moments she is silently and stealthily urging on their southward road.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT.

THE air is mild and balmy, moist with the early rains, which have hardly ceased, and the temperature becomes more summer-like the further they leave behind the bold heights of the mountains. Nature is robed in fresh verdure; and delicate tints of blossoming trees—peach, citron, fig, palm, and pear—adorn the fields, while fragrant odors load the air.

Mildly the west wind breathes from off the shore, and the sky is covered with small light clouds. Reposing at noon beneath some shady terebinth, and at night in some lonely caravan-serai, they reach, on the second evening, the borders of that vast desert, whose burning sands stretch westward to the mouths of the Nile, southward to the mountains of Arabia and the Red Sea.

Here, at a small sea-port town, Joseph procures two dromedaries, whose great speed may sooner carry them through the sterile wastes; and upon these fleet ships of the desert they embark, and leave their native land. Upon their right the horizon line of the glassy sea,

upon their left the yellow, sickly haze of the fiery sands, and through the haze the misty peaks of Arabia. Above is a sky unrelieved by a single cloud, but every where one transparent bluish white, and a sun blazing all day with immitigable splendor. Thus they press forward, touching, if possible, at some island oasis, and reposing, during the hours of noon, beneath the stately palms, whose feathery tufts cast a soft shade to earth, riding only in the cool, dewy hours preceding dawn.

So swift is their monotonous course, that a few days bring them in sight of the blessed Nile, and of the ancient ruins of the city of the Sun.

With what interest do they cross the still fertile pasture-lands of Goshen, trodden ages ago by the shepherd patriarchs! And lo! upon the other side of the river, raise their summits to the clouds those stupendous pyramids, in constructing which, tradition says their ancestors were enslaved.

“Mountains of stone!” they exclaim to one another, “who could ever suppose them to have been the work of human hands! Yet there, perchance, our fathers toiled in bondage, not unavenged! Here Moses and Aaron trod, and wrought, by Jehovah’s command, such mighty plagues upon their oppressors!”

And as they draw nigh to the sacred stream, identical with the chief Egyptian divinity Osiris, "the great Nilus, father of the highest deities, even of Ammon," they remember how it became, under the rod of the Hebrew prophet, the source of three terrible inflictions. They rehearse that wondrous narrative (familiar to the lip of childhood), which, beginning at the inundation of the sacred river, usually the period of festivity, grasps, one after another, those physical scourges to which Egypt is liable, and causes them to succeed one upon another, in a terrible circle of vengeance, heightening each, and darkening to the last, until all Egypt shrieks in mourning, and the haughty monarch is heard exclaiming, "Up! get you out from the land!"

Vividly recalling these events upon the very soil where they occurred, their emotions become too great to be restrained, and, in responsive number, they mutually repeat couplets of an ancient psalm.

JOSEPH.

"He turned their waters into blood,
And their river, that they could not drink!"

MARY.

"He spake, and there came divers sorts of flies,
And gnats into all their coasts."

JOSEPH.

"He gave them hail for rain,
And flaming fire in their land!"

MARY.

"He gave up their cattle also to the hail,
And their flocks to hot thunderbolts."

JOSEPH.

"He sent darkness and made it dark,
And they rebelled not against his word."

MARY.

"He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger,
Wrath, and indignation, and trouble,
By sending evil angels among them."

JOSEPH.

"He weighed a path to his anger,
He spared not their soul from death,
But gave their life over to the pestilence."

MARY.

"He smote all the first-born in Egypt,
The chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham!"

Then, too, rushes upon their memory the sublime catastrophe. While Egypt is bowed and crushed by stroke upon stroke, they behold the mustering of the fugitives to the central city, whose very walls they are now approaching. The solemn and singular paschal supper just celebrated for the first time, they behold them gathering in crowds from their different quarters, hastened and helped by the submissive Egyptians. Laden with the proffered spoil, a motley tide of life, with flocks and herds, they wind across to the distant line of sea.

Then comes the infatuated pursuit—the panic-stricken, helpless throng—the rushing of the

mighty northeast wind all night down the gulf—the long train winding through the stormy pass, the Egyptian host upon their rear. The morning dawns, and the retiring waves are rolling and dashing where an army had been an hour before. Pausing in their way, and looking afar to the distant sea, they again take up the responsive chant.

JOSEPH.

“With the blast of thy nostrils the waters were gathered together;
The floods stood upright as a heap,
And the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea.”

MARY.

“The enemy said I will pursue,
I will overtake, I will divide the spoil;
My lust shall be satisfied upon them;
I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.”

JOSEPH:

“Thou didst blow with thy wind—the sea covered them:
They sank as lead in the mighty waters.”

MARY.

“Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods!
Who is like thee, glorious in holiness,
Fearful in praises, doing wonders!”

So saying, they resume their winding way along the banks of a small tributary of the Nile, its margin fringed with reeds of the papyrus, and overshadowed by the date-bearing palm, and reflecting the walls of a city built upon its bank.*

* Probably Leontopolis.

“Where, within this foreign, this idolatrous city, may we sad exiles find a home?” asks Mary, disconsolately.

“Fear not but that the Lord God of our fathers will provide,” answers Joseph; “and know, moreover, that here many of our nation abide, with temple, and priests, and holy worship; among these we will seek a lodging, and not in the home of the stranger.”

And now they enter the city gates, through those massive walls, built on high embankments and piles, and begin to wander through the populous streets and squares, where tower on high the lofty obelisks, the solemn ranges of Coptic architecture, covered with hieroglyphics, and uncouth and obscene sculptures. Weary, at length, with searching for the quarter occupied by their brethren, and spent with the heat of the sultry air, they pause beneath the shadow of a vast pile, gloomily adorned with sphinxes, and other monsters of the grotesque chisel of the Nile. Here, while breathing a silent prayer to the God of Israel, they behold advancing toward them a venerable stranger, wearing the garb of the sons of Aaron. And the old man asks,

“Whither goest thou, and whence comest thou?”

And Joseph replies, “We are come from Beth-

lehem-Judah unto the land of Ham, fleeing from the face of Herod the king, and there is no man that receiveth us to house; yet there is both straw and provender for our camels, and there is bread and wine also for me and for thy handmaid; there is no want of any thing."

Then answers the old man, "Peace be with thee: howsoever, let all thy wants lie upon me, only lodge not in the street." So he brings them into his house, and while he gives provender to the camels, they wash their feet, and eat and drink, and make their hearts merry.

Reclining in the court, we behold them upon soft mats, listening to the cool, plashing fountain, exhilarated with the scene of safety and of refuge, and breathing the rich odors of tropical flowers, while they rehearse, so far as they may, to hospitable Benaiah, the history of their flight, and the news from their native land.

Upon a mattress the youthful mother has laid her child, and gazes on him with a mother's ever new delight, while the maidens of the household wonder at the beauty of the infant fugitive.

[Like some strange exotic dropped from Paradise, and all unwonted in this world, seems to these daughters of the Nile that babe, with those dark, radiant eyes, wherein seems to sleep a

sorrowful and divine glory. Even over ordinary infancy often hovers, like a mist, an air of mysterious sacredness, and shadows of strange, unworldly meaning often seem to float far away down in the clear depths of an infant's eye, as if there passed over the spirit the

"dim remembrances, whose hues seem taken
From some bright former state, our own no more."

What marvel, then, that the cradle of this "only one" of earth seemed sanctified, even to the passing stranger, by a singular charm, and that something that hushed the voice and stilled the breath often seemed to linger around that holy child Jesus.*]

By the serene, deep eye of the mother, fixed on him at intervals, it is plain that she is musing on the future, and on the meaning of this strange vicissitude in his career. Little can she yet fathom the mighty meanings darkly hidden under those prophetic words, "Out of Egypt have I called my Son."

Yet feeble in her comprehension of him as the mystic representative and head of a spiritual Israel, as well as their Redeemer, she sees there a destined conqueror, and national deliverer and king, and somewhat more, but undefined.

We see in him, as it were, the frail prison-

* This passage is from the pen of Mrs. H. E. B. Stowe.

house of a sovereign spirit, veiled voluntarily in earth, emptied of previous fullness of attribute, and in all points made like and equal with his brethren, that he may share with them all the low vicissitudes and temptations from which otherwise he must be unavoidably exempt.

These or similar scenes, though we but fancy them, must have been once real. And who would not call up the scene as it most probably occurred, and, imagination being chastened by inspired records, live it over again? Who would not watch the first indications of that dawning reason—those oblivious reminiscences of forgotten but recovered powers—the first showings forth of the mysterious agent within those walls? Nay, what would we not give for an hour's discourse with one of those forgotten ones, who saw the thousand minute details of that veiled infancy, as month after month rolls by, and he begins to emerge from the shade of life's twilight into the first purple dawn of childhood? And yet it is but vain to wish. They lived and died, and their dust—where is it? The mighty city where they dwelt, and all its ponderous piles, is now no more—its name almost forgotten; but that infant's history eternity can never bury in oblivion.

Methinks I behold that gathered household,

in the cool of evening, in the twilight mansion. Joseph has just returned from the market-place, and brings upon his pallid cheek the omen of some fearful tale. Anxiously they turn their eyes upon him, while he thus reveals the news just brought by a company of merchants from Jerusalem :

“When the magi, being warned of God in a dream that they should not return unto Herod, had departed to their own country another way, then Herod, seeing he was mocked by them, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the magi.”

Exclamations of horror break from every lip.

“Lo! what must have been our fate!” exclaims the mother, gazing down upon her child.

“How long, O Lord,” ejaculates another, “wilt thou give thine heritage unto reproach?”

“O city of David!” cries a third, “what scenes for such sacred walls! One would think the shades of the mighty would have risen from beneath in indignation!”

“Yea, and of the patriarchs!” echoes another.

“There sleep the ashes of the beloved Rachel,” answers Benaiah.

“And then was fulfilled,” adds Mary, “the word of Jeremy the prophet: ‘In Rama was a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning; Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.’”

“Thou hast well spoken, my daughter,” replies the priest. “And what saith he yet again? ‘Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears, for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy, and there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border.’ Soon shall the cruel oppressor cease, the exiles be gathered, our sleepers in the dust awake, and the redeemed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion. Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away forever.”

“Even so—it is even at the door,” answers Joseph. “The days of Herod are numbered. He hath discovered the conspiracy of his own son Antipater against his life, and has him chained, awaiting Cæsar’s permission to put him to death; meanwhile his own torments grow daily more horrible, and he himself so loathsome that none can abide his presence. Foul ulcers gnaw all the lower parts of his body, and

convulsions rack his whole frame. All the chief men of the nation hath he shut up in the Hippodrome at Jericho, and it is said that when he dies he means to have them put to death, that there may be mourning at his death. Thus the hour of deliverance makes haste."

"The Lord be praised!" responds Benaiah. "For what saith the same Scripture? 'Hear the word of the Lord, O ye Gentiles, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd doth his flock.'"

"And yet," responds Joseph, "I have doubted, from this same prophecy, whether they be altogether in error who say that Jerusalem must first be broken down. How else, O venerable Benaiah, can the city be built, as Jeremy saith, 'from the tower of Hananeel unto the gate of the corner, and thence onward upon the hill Gareb,' where now is no wall? I remember, when I was but a stripling, following a certain wild and visionary man, who came up to the feast, as he trod over the line marked out by the prophet, accompanied by a few of the common people. He went forth upon the hill Gareb; thence he turned to Goath, and trod the naked earth as the prophet describes, encompassing the whole valley of dead bodies, and all

the fields, unto the corner of the horse-gate toward the east. Then, as he stood on an eminence, and waved his lank arm and the prophet's scroll over the foul and putrid valley of Gehenna, he cried, with a loud voice, 'Shall this be builded over as a city? Shall this be girded about with walls?' And then, unrolling his scroll, he cried, 'Hear ye the word of the Lord! It shall be holy unto the Lord, it shall not be plucked up nor thrown down any more forever.' I was but a youth, yet his words sunk down into my heart, and I have often asked, must not the city first be broken down?"

"Even so, my son, do many of the wisest doctors solemnly affirm," answers Benaiah, "and such they declare to be the testimony of Daniel when he saith, 'And after three score and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself; and the people of the coming prince shall destroy the city and the sanctuary, and the end thereof—'"

But here he is interrupted by a faint groan from Mary, who had been an absorbed listener to the conversation. Turning his eyes toward her, he perceives her silently raising her child in her arms, and retiring to her apartment. Supposing himself to have been deceived in the sound, he continues the conversation.

But that mother, in the dim starlight of her solitary apartment, we hear whisper, sighing, "After three score and two weeks? Ah! fatal oracle! How shall I solve this dark enigma?" And a voice seems sounding in her ear mournfully, "A sword shall pierce through thine own soul also!" "And yet, what said the angel? God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. And those magi, whose gifts he wears upon his neck, they came worshipping him that was born King of the Jews! How, then, 'cut off?' and how this exile? Alas! alas! I can not fathom it." And so, wrestling in spirit, she falls asleep.

Thus May glides by, and the heats of June begin. Soon they behold the first tokens of the swelling of the Nile. Its corrupting waters grow green as emerald, and are covered all over with dark patches of a mossy substance of similar hue. For a score of days the putrescent element may not be drank, and all the inhabitants are parched with thirst. At last, however, August brings down from the far hills of Ethiopia their red, muddy torrents, and the tide begins to rise. Criers daily perambulate the streets, proclaiming the rate of increase of the sacred river, and every where the thrifty merchant and the anxious husbandman are calculating

the future harvest. Now the river is full. Now it begins to overflow the banks. Now, too, the hundreds of canals, dikes, and sluices are opened, and the whole country laid under water.

No sooner has the fertilizing inundation reached its height, than on every side is heard a general jubilee; gifts are interchanged, and the waters covered with parties of pleasure in boats of every description; and merriment, mirth, and music, both of voices and of many antique instruments, resound across the teeming tide. Now, also, upon the glassy surface spreads the leaf of the exquisitely fragrant lotus flower, and the whole atmosphere seems redolent of balmy odors.

In the midst of such new, such pleasing scenes, another nocturnal message thrills the hearts of the exiled family with joy: "Arise, take the young child and his mother, and journey into the land of Israel, for they are dead which sought the young child's life."

But when this was known to the hospitable Benaiah and his house, it came to pass that they lifted up their voice and wept!

And he said, "The God of thy fathers bless thee, and bless this thy wife, and the fruit of her womb! And now I know the Lord will do me good, and good unto Israel, since I have

seen your faces as it is this day. Yea, it shall come to pass that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And the Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian Sea, and with his mighty hand shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dry-shod! Then will we say, 'O Lord, I will praise thee; though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me.' "

Thus bidding adieu to their kind friends, amid blessings and words of kindness, in the cool of morning, long before dawn, while the starry heavens are all reflected in the waters that stretch on every side, they put forth, and we behold the tall dromedaries picking their way along the dikes and embankments, from one island village to another, by the way of the land of the Philistines. Not a cloud in the sky, not a vapor in the air. The north wind, that blows all day long against the turbulent stream, has not yet sprung up. On every side, far as the eye can reach, Mary beholds only a calm, mir-

ror sea, dotted with isolated villages, and clumps of spectral palms, and the lofty edifices of the city they are leaving behind.

All things are double. The very heavens of glory seem underarching them, and they poised in the center of a sphere of gleaming stars. And wherefore not, since one was there, though veiled, around whose glorious rising all the universe must yet revolve, as stars about the sun?

Thus they bid farewell to Egypt, with her mighty memories—Egypt, basest of kingdoms, in whose history, however, a chapter yet remains unwritten. They leave her fiery sky, her poisonous gales, her plague and pestilence behind.

Their stopping-place, about the fourth night, is at a caravanserai upon the southern side of Palestine. While here, their attention is arrested by the conversation of travelers in the area of the court, lately come from the hill country. From this they gather that Archelaus, Herod's son by his fifth wife, Maltace, has succeeded to the throne by his father's will. The known character of this prince, however, is such that the idea of a residence so near to his jealous eye as Bethlehem, strikes them with alarm. Fierce as his father, and as cruel, but destitute of his father's genius, his first essay of power

was, they learn, in quelling a tumult caused by his own refusal to grant some popular request, in which he bathed the temple pavements with the blood of some three thousand slaughtered citizens.

Recalling, then, the quiet, the obscure Nazareth, in its hidden mountain nook, thitherward they turn their steps, and up by the sea-beaten shore they wind along.

The ancient mounds of old Gaza see them go by. Askelon marks them; Eskron and Ashdod, proud cities of Philistia. Joppa rises in their view; and on their right, the familiar outline of Samaria's blue hills. Carmel, further north, rears himself upon the left. And far, far in the distance, they recognize the dim but well-known outlines of HERMON, hiding his icy summit in the clouds.

Not far from the end of August, weary and worn, we behold this humble family safely housed once more beneath the paternal roof, there to repose for a short time after their toilsome journeying.

What a crowd of emotions besiege the virgin mother's heart, as, casting aside the dusty habiliments of travel, and arrayed once more in the more grateful as well as graceful robes of home life, she wanders free, and with fresh spir-

its, through the scenes of her childhood, visiting every room, and every well-known, favorite spot on the hills around her picturesque abode.

Once more she stands in the garden, where she stood more than a year ago, and looks again far forth upon that southern landscape. But ah! with what altered prospects! with what changed emotions! What things have conspired to work their changes on the soul of that simple, artless Jewish girl! Through what alternations has she passed in the short space of a few months—of joy and sorrow, hope and fear, repose and agitated enterprise! What sudden and combining developments of unforeseen destinies! How large an unrolling of the scroll of Fate! She thinks of the sad winter's journey to Bethlehem, the cavern scenes, the shepherds, the temple, old Simeon and Anna, the magi, the flight to the Nile, the massacre they escaped sharing, the return; all these things picture themselves in her mind as she gazes on her child, and, with swelling heart and moistened eye, thinks it all over.

“Truly,” she thinks, “did the angel promise me! God hath fulfilled, thus far, his word.”

That child can now sit there alone upon the mossy bank, and sport, with many wiles, at her sandaled feet, every little wile dearer to her

heart than worlds; and what with the actual past and present of his history, and what she knows, or hopes, or dreads of the future, and what with her natural mother's love, I see that her heart is full—full of emotion, which she can neither express nor I describe.

With what regret do we tear ourselves away from the contemplation of this scene! How like bidding adieu, as it were, to an only sister, does it seem here to lose sight of the lovely and beautiful Mary, with whose fortunes we have been so long conversant! How dark and dreary is that chasm of twelve years which must now intervene ere we see her again! And that child also, at whom we never look without wonder, and whose presence hath already created so great sensation, even before he has exerted a single faculty of thought, how can we lose sight of him for a single day? Would it not be a joy to us to witness the first unfoldings of the earthly thinkings of that spirit from a distant sphere now first imprisoned—the first impressions made thereon by the gentle accents of a mother's voice, rehearsing ancient verses of the Word, and (as her duty was by the Mosaic law) teaching him to lisp them in his turn?

Ah! wondrous spectacle! when I behold that trembling maiden approach with awe the task

of impressing her own thoughts and feelings upon the opening mind of that inscrutable being now waxing strong in spirit, and on whom the grace of God is shed abundantly! When I hear her instruct that child of his own wonderful origin, and the scenes attending his present condition, and of the career that prophetic oracles mark out before him, I am filled with strange dread, and yet delight in view of such a mighty task.

What mother ever enjoyed such blessed delight as was hers? Whom, not without reason, we have heard an angel's voice pronounce, "Blessed above women!" What fault could she ever discern? What tardy lack of comprehension? What forgetful heedlessness? How did the results of her tuition outrun all her conceptions, her most sanguine hopes? Nay, what hidden depths of power, half unconsciously intimated rather than revealed, filled her soul with awe at what she was attempting! And what chiding, withal, was she ever forced to bestow? What breath to breathe of censure? What sparklings forth of sudden fires, as though some fiend of the pit had been caught and pent up there, ever could startle and terrify her? What but a continually augmenting tide of admiration, pride, exultation, and the tenderest

love, ever filled her mind during those twelve long years!

How, if upon another child, with all the obliquities and perversities of a fallen being momentarily evolving themselves from the imprisoned interior, a mother can yet fix an idolizing attachment, oh how, with preternatural, unspeakable intensity, must the unchecked, unalloyed love of this virgin mother have concentrated itself, where it could not become idolatrous by any possibility, upon the loveliest of all the spirits that ever came to earth?

And yet we can see directly naught of this. God hath not been pleased to speak thereof, and with sighing and sadness, therefore, we must leave blank in our minds these twelve years, save so far as they rise before us in our reverential musings.

CHAPTER XIV.

JESUS AND THE RABBINS.

ALONG the Roman military road running northward from Jerusalem toward the great plain of Esdraelon, we behold travelers returning from the Passover.

As evening draws nigh, we attach ourselves to a company, or small caravan of Galileans, who turn aside for the night, and pitch their tents upon the high table-land between Gilgal and Shiloh.

The camels and other beasts of burden are soon unloaded, and fastened for the night. All is bustle and animation, while from capacious panniers are drawn all the necessaries of the traveler's life, and preparations are made for the evening repast.

Meanwhile, scattered through the glades of the forest, young men and maidens chant responsive strains of the temple psalms, and make the groves resound.

Apart from the rest, a solitary female arrests our attention, as she sits remote, gazing abstractedly toward the majestic outline of the dark blue mountains of the north. Something

in her form and bearing suggests that she is not wholly a stranger to us, and, as she turns her head, a single glance suffices to identify the matchless features of the royal daughter of David.

Time has dealt kindly with the Virgin Mary, profaning no charm, but rather enhancing and spiritualizing all, so that twelve peaceful, gliding years have served only to etherealize and exalt what seemed before incapable of improvement. If, indeed, her step be statelier, and her glance more assured, and her expression a shade more saddened, yet still the thirsty eye, insatiable with seeing, drinks eager draughts of that same rich flood of mingling emanations of loveliness that form an atmosphere about her delicate and symmetrical person.

There is the same spiritual serenity, united with a profounder thoughtfulness, a more inquiring and matured reflection. There is the same mystery of earnest wishfulness, which shows that life's enigma is still for her unsolved, and the prophetic future not less inscrutable, nor less anxious by its nearer approach. No scenes of splendid festivity nor of brilliant gaiety have enervated her high powers, nor swerved their determined questioning from the goal of the future. Far from the bowers of music and

mirth, unknown to the great, gaudy vanity-fair of Pharisaic elegance, her gentle hand has dispensed other spells than those of festive sorcery. Sequestered in her thoughtful abodes, she has been wrestling with the deepest questions that can agitate the mind of any pilgrim of earth. A new incident is now preparing to reawaken and reagitate the painful intensity of those concealed inquiries that form the inward habit of her soul.

Returning to her tent, she is met by the startling intelligence from her husband, that her son is absent. Through every tent search is made in vain; he is not only absent, but has not been (as they had confided) in the company during the day.

Now, if this absence might be attributed to youthful carelessness, it need not create any serious alarm; but Mary reflects too surely that no such explanation can be probable of one whose minutest motions have ever given indications of calm and advised design. Hence the only explanation that offers to her mind is one that whispers of some disaster, some forcible detention, or catastrophe of a nature she can scarce dare to conjecture.

The recent banishment of Archelaus, the tyrannical successor of Herod the Great, gives her

no assurance, for it brings the country only the more directly under the Roman government; and the vigilance of that haughty tyranny would be prompt to seize upon any individual who might be looked upon as the future leader of a popular insurrection, especially should they, by any means, have discovered the circumstances of his birth, his royal lineage, and his heirship to the throne of David, as attested by the angel, and by the shepherds, and by the magi.

Agitated by these reflections, and incapable of further refreshment or repose, she proposes an immediate return; and, while the shades of evening darken around, bidding adieu to their sympathizing kinsfolk in the encampment, they hasten back upon the paved highway toward the city.

Arriving in the early dawn, they explore the different inns and other rendezvous of travelers, they explore the temple, and pace to and fro the city streets, but in that vast metropolis they can find no trace of him. Her son is lost.

! A second day passes in like fruitless endeavors, and still deeper in heart sinks the thought of some dark fate that has fallen upon him. Perchance, she thinks, he is even now seized by some of the watchful spies of jealous tyranny, and languishing in a dungeon; and, at the

thought, she would fain rush toward the guarded portals of the procurator's palace, or the gloomy gates of the tower Antonia.

First, however, they resolve to search once more the different portions of the Temple, that vast and complicated structure of courts, and galleries, and chambers, and halls, yea, and with shuddering she remembers, of many a darksome cavern underneath, hewed out in the living rock.

Once more they traverse those extensive areas. Above, below, within, without, wherever a youthful wanderer might be so easily concealed, every where inquiring of priest, of Levite, and of citizen for the child in vain; the only answer is, "He is not here."

"Ah!" she thinks, "why did I bring him? And yet it was in obedience to the law of our fathers! And yet, the very first time, thus to find him snatched mysteriously away! Oh, fatal prophet!" she internally ejaculates, as she pauses by the Gate Nicanor, and recalls the words uttered there years ago by hoary Simeon, "is this, then, the fulfillment of thy word? Is this that 'keen sword' that is piercing through my very soul?"

At length, after having well-nigh given over the fruitless search, as despondingly they are passing nigh the hall of the Sanhedrim, their

attention is arrested by exclamations of admiration proceeding from within an adjacent room, whose door is partly open, and directly, while all becomes hushed again, a silvery voice continues speaking. A mother's ear has caught the well-known sound, and in an instant she is standing in the midst of the spacious apartment, by the side of her child, in whom her own features seem, as it were, reproduced, her own likeness reflected back.

There, with serene brow, and countenance beaming with indications of profound thought, he sits in unconscious simplicity, while around him gather in amazement the sages of the nation. There we recognize most venerable Hillel, whose head is yet whiter than when we saw him standing before King Herod; there his equally learned friend, Shammai; there, also, Rabbis Judah, Joshua, and Ben Uzziel; there Nicodemus, a youthful ruler; and there, in short, the flower of Jewish learning, science, and wit. What can her child be doing there?

In the simple language of Luke, "He is hearing them, and asking them questions."

These veterans in the subtleties of the law find a child in their midst, whose clear, unruffled judgment meets, on terms of equality, their long-practised wits, displaying already that pro-

found acquaintance with the law which only the unwearied assiduity of such a mother, united to the surpassing genius of such a son, could account for, and which they have scarce attained by half a century's toilsome study.

Taking in all this at a glance, Mary, though first abashed by the presence of so reverend a synod, obeys at length the maternal instinct, and, clasping her son by the hand, exclaims,

“Son! why hast thou dealt thus with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing!”

And this is the first reproof those lips have ever been compelled to utter! How then is she startled by the unexpected reply, so dignified, so lofty, so impressively suggesting his high destiny, at the same time seeming to turn the reproof gently back upon herself,

“How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about MY FATHER'S business?”

And yet, with immediate filial reverence he rises up, unseduced by that homage, to youth so intoxicating—the homage of well-established literary judgment to precocious talent—leaves that throng of great men, who would detain him, accompanies his mother and the lowly carpenter to Nazareth, to be unknown for almost twenty years, and is “subject unto them!”

The more I think upon this scene, the more enchanting does it grow. Never was there, in fewer words, drawn a more perfect picture than this of the youthful Jesus. They wondered at his words, those hoary sages, astute and subtle Pharisee, skeptical Sadducee, and they questioned, doubtless, among themselves of him; doubtless many marvelings were interchanged concerning his parentage, education, and the means of such erudition; perchance they recurred to the memorable excitement just before the death of Herod, when a father and mother, and a certain child, were much noised abroad; but those were of Bethlehem, and the child was doubtless slain in the general massacre; these are of Galilee, and out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.

They knew him not. They dream not what spirit is behind that fair tabernacle, looking out of those mild human eyes, speaking with those melodious tones; truly he is in the world, and the world knows him not!

Even that mother, who sees him daily, to whom he meekly subjects himself, and whose influence upon him is most constant, with all her incessant study, her woman's penetration, her mother's insight, finds that there is a mind beneath her care of whose fathomless deeps she

can know nothing. She can but keep all his sayings in her heart.

Especially is she amazed by the manner in which he receives the ideas she endeavors to communicate, with such entireness of appreciation, such enlargement of their scope, as transcends all her powers. Thus, how has he received her teaching that he is, by the angelic description, "Son of the Highest!" This, which she has often labored fully to comprehend, while impressing it on his youthful mind, he now develops as a profound and practical element of his interior life.

"Wist ye not that I must be about MY FATHER'S business?"

"Ah!" she thinks, "he belongs not to me! Awhile Heaven lends him to my sight, but, ere long, that hidden destiny will claim him from me!" And oh, what, with such reflections, must then become the life of Mary, whom all succeeding generations may well pronounce most blessed!

Does she not, for nearly thirty years, enjoy with this being uninterrupted communion, and that in the most hallowed of all human relations? And did she not, as none other could, at once give and receive impressions, which fill our thoughts with wonder, while she beheld the

secret ways and domestic life of him whom she knew not, though she called him her son?

Methinks could I summon from the abodes of the blessed one earthly spirit for a few hours' communion, if it were not that of my own mother, it should be that of this beloved mother of Jesus, who should reveal to me the story of his early years.

But, however dark these long chasms in his life may seem to us now, however we may deplore that not a single starbeam can gild the darkness of those years, let us reflect that there will be a day, if we please, when all this holy mystery shall be enlarged and made clear to our purified vision.

When, in the mansions of our final rest, we roam the fields of a fairer Palestine, in company with a fairer Mary than earth knew, we shall see her in angelic loveliness, and listen to her own story of those sacred years; but, above all, we shall stand in the presence of that other diviner, more radiant, but still human form of one whom we have followed from the cave of Bethlehem to the banks of the Nile, to the halls of rabbinical learning, and to the quiet recesses of maternal tenderness.

Then may we meet his own eye of unclouded serene affection bent upon us as we approach

and bow before him. Then may we know from his own adorable lips all our souls can desire, all our finite powers can sustain, of his earthly history, and his immortal work of love.

“We'll gaze upon his beauteous face,
 And tell the wonders of his grace ;
 Or, overwhelm'd with rapture sweet,
 Sink down adoring at his feet.”

CHAPTER XV.

THE VOICE CRYING IN THE WILDER-
NESS.

IT is the morning of a lovely day in March. The sun's rays are just glancing across the blue tops of the Arabian mountains, and gleaming upon the waves of Asphaltites, a sea as brilliant to the eye, and laughing as gladly in the sun, as though no doomed cities had ever been engulfed in its abyss. And yet those sluggish waters answer not to the caresses of the wind, no ripple curls upon their silver mirror, no surf beats upon the shore; it is, in truth, a dead sea, whose slimy surges sleep, the melancholy pall of a fire-deluged vale.

A dark range of rocks rises frowning, not far from the sterile eastern sands, and girds the whole extent, and, save where far to the north numerous recent torrents are foaming down, the eye can discover no motion for miles of savage dreariness. No verdure, no sign of living thing. The petrel and the sea-gull fly not above those leafless crags. The beautiful white marine doves that swim all day long upon the Syr-

ian wave, never dip their breast in that bituminous sea. Nor upon the wide reach of the desolate shore can we discern even a skiff or hut of a lonely fisherman.

We ourselves are standing upon an eminence among the barren, cavernous mountains which descend from Jerusalem to the Salt Sea and the Jordan. The prospect furnishes little to cheer the eye, but much to awaken sentiments of gloom. A few trees here and there add a lonely beauty to the severe grandeur of the rocks, but almost every where we behold only somber and shattered masses of many-colored stone, or broad reaches of dull and fiery sand.

Emerging from a cavern above us, whose dark mouth our eye can not penetrate, we behold a tall and noble figure approaching, who, by the freedom of his tread, and the air of happy communion with nature with which he gazes abroad, appears to be no stranger to these wild abodes. As he draws nearer, we scan his appearance more minutely, and discover in his face, his figure, and his garb the indications of no common presence. Austere and resolute decision resides in the lines of that mouth, almost hidden though it be by the black untrimmed beard. In his eye burns a clear and steady beam like a lamp, and upon that pale brow is the

stamp of concentrated thought. Sandals of the coarsest skins protect his feet from the rock on which he treads. His shaggy upper garment, woven from the roughest hair of the camel, is confined with a broad leathern girdle about his loins, and as he walks he plucks from the rocks a piece of honey-comb, deposited in the clefts by the wild swarms of the desert. A few locusts, food of the humblest peasant of this barren domain, complete the frugal meal of a man apparently so lost in internal musings and undeveloped plans that external luxuries can find no hold upon him.

Ah, noble nature, born for great deeds, sent from God! nurtured apart from thy race in the gloomy recesses of a magnificent desert, habituated from childhood to such unlimited freedom from the shackles of social life and all sensual bonds; if such be now thy lofty soul, uncontaminated with a nation's profligate effeminacy, long went to commune with the Spirit that made these stupendous scenes in the very spot where once blazed the terrific revelation of his wrath in a red deluge out of heaven; where now stagnates for ages the pool entombing those towers accursed; if such thine abode, such thy habits, and such thy mind, what message must that be which thou art bearing? What has such as

thou to say to a voluptuous, sensual, ambitious, distracted, formal, hypocritical generation? and what must be that other man before whose advent such messenger prepares the way?

Art thou, oh wild and sacred hermit of these inhospitable realms, art thou the fit precursor of a kingdom of this world? And whither now, in the early spring, borne onward at length by the calling voice of thy divine inspiration, dost thou turn thy steps? now, when the great paschal festival, being ended, has dismissed the gathered thousands of Israel, and the whole nation seems in motion, and when, across even the deserts of the Jordan and Upper Asphaltites, multitudes are beginning to move in search of the far-famed son of Zacharias?

Northward he goes; and as he emerges from the more desolate parts toward the more traveled districts, and as his eye, taking in the whole landscape, begins to note one company after another of pilgrims, here on foot and there on mules, or perchance on camels, what new agitation appears to disturb the serenity of that face, what thoughts appear contending for utterance?

Behold him, at length, yielding to some resistless impulse, and, feeling that the crisis has arrived, ascend yon commanding eminence over-

looking the whole plain. Hark! a cry, sonorous, wild, and shrill, piercing like a trumpet, goes forth above the scattered band of seekers; a cry, ringing from rock to rock, and waking a thousand echoes from their startled caves; a cry that fascinates the ear, and draws, as by a spell, around one common center the far-distant pilgrims. And what is the burden of that cry?

“REPENT, FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND!”

“Repent! Three ancient dynasties have rolled away, the fourth is at its climax, the hour of birth of a final kingdom is at hand!”

What singular proclamation is this! in what a scene, by that old sulphur lake of Sodom and Gomorrah; to what an audience; by what a herald!

Gathering from every side below the elevated point where he stands, clustering in every rugged defile, in every precipitous chasm, scaling every accessible rock, swarming on every tree, and even crouching on the sandy plain that stretches far away to the shores of the sea upon his right, every eye riveted upon one form, relieved against the clear, deep sky, every ear strained to catch his musical tones, haste the seeking seed of Abraham.

That landscape, a few hours since a lifeless

desert, is now dark with forms; a sea of turbans, swart-bearded visages, and purple tunics, as though by enchantment the wizard earth had disclosed the hidden brood.

And now, into the very heart of this attentive throng sink down the lightning words of this inspired herald. In all that assembly not one lives who has not heard of a coming Messiah, and panted for his hour; who has not, with more or less of ardor, pictured forth the splendor of his triumphal reign, and the long-deferred deliverance of his native soil. And what news now strikes upon their ears? What mighty conviction shoots with electric searching through the mazy sympathies of that impulsive, glowing population?

“Behold!” he cries, “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight!”

Here, at length, has arrived in view the great era! The time is at hand; the promised glory soon to be unveiled.

“Behold!” he exclaims, “I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee; every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain brought low; the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

But what agitating doubt rebukes the presumptuous security of each carnal heart; what alarm mixed with triumphant announcement, what invective, burning in the midst of words of promise, spreads panic through all hearts, and crimson manly cheeks with shame? With rapid allusion to the stirring present, to the traditional past, weaving from the familiar voices of their prophets utterances of might, he flashes on their quickened sense a view of coming judgments ushering in the glory of the Lord.

“Repent!” he cries; “prepare to meet the purging splendors of the coming judge; for, behold, the Lord whom ye seek, even the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in, shall suddenly come to his temple. But who may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appeareth; for he is like a refiner’s fire, and like fuller’s soap, and he will come near unto you to judgment.

“Wo, therefore, unto you that desire the day of the Lord! To what end is it for you, ye sorcerers, ye adulterers, ye false swearers, and ye oppressors of the hireling in his wages, and of the widow and fatherless, and that wrong the stranger! The day of the Lord is darkness and not light, as if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him, or fled into his house, and

leaned his hand on the wall, and a scorpion bit him! Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness unto you, O ye that are at ease in Zion? that say, let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it, and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it; shall it not be very dark, and no brightness in it?

“Alas for the day! for the day of the Lord is at hand; as a day of destruction from the Almighty shall it come; a day of darkness and gloominess; a day of clouds and thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, and there shall be wonders in heaven, and in the earth, blood and fire, and pillars of smoke. For lo! the day that cometh shall burn as an oven, and all the proud; yea, all that do wickedly, shall be as stubble, and the day that cometh shall burn them up: it shall leave them neither root nor branch; but they that fear his name shall tread the wicked as ashes under their feet. Repent ye, therefore, and be purified, lest he come and smite you with a curse.”

Such in substance, doubtless, are the appeals that make all that hear them tremble. Prepared by birth, by hope deferred, and by the ex-

igencies of the time, for the reception of some startling intelligence, yet living in flagrant iniquity and proud formality, such message bursts upon them with all the effect of novelty, and all the resistless movement of awakened conscience and remorseful terror.

Destitute of any suspicion of a dispensation intervening before the resurrection of the dead, and the kingdom of Messiah thereby to be ushered in; wholly incapable of assigning their just succession to the mighty events crowding dark about the gloomy grandeur of the approaching day; with nothing to defer, and thus defeat the application of all its solemn insignia of judgment to themselves in person, the power of his announcement must be all incalculable. The waves of that living sea surge sighing to and fro under his stormy eloquence, and forth from that gathering goes out upon the hills a kindling rumor. Leaving, as by universal consent, their daily employments, enthusiastic thousands throng from far and near, and, when he reaches the fords of Bethabara, his progress seems the triumphal movement of a conquering host.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PURIFICATION.

IN the center of a broad desert of sand flows the Jordan, all concealed as yet from view. We walk upon a level floor of sand, the saline crust at every step crunching like snow beneath our feet. Up the western gorges morning billows of mist are rolling, while the plain between forms a gigantic stairway of shelves or terraces of sand.

But where, then, is the Jordan, and its busy hum of men, its noise of many waters, with ever and anon the bark of the jackal, the far roar of the lion, or cry of other wild beast coming up from the swelling of the tide? No moving thing appears, unless far away a solitary Arab be espied scouring across the horizon. Only in the center of the desert we observe a belt of green, and approaching, as we descend the abrupt slope of the last sandy platform across which we have been passing, we are translated suddenly within the loveliest of Oriental vales, umbrageous, cool, delicious—seemingly the production of some enchanter's wand.

Far in the center rushes still concealed the

swollen Jordan, swift as arrowy Rhone, fringed with thirsty plants, which, bodily breasting the risen waves, trail all their pliant tresses in the stream.

A carpet of velvet green, embossed with various flowers, extends to the watery marge. Groves of sycamores, acacias, and tall and plummy shrubs, Persian poplars, with their polished stems, willows of every species, and lofty osiers, mix their soft and delicate foliage, pierced here and there to an enormous height by the feathery palm, rejoicing as lord paramount of the scene, while about their trunks convolvuli are twisting and twining impenetrable bowers.

Through these pleasant vistas the scattered multitudes are spreading, young and old, male and female, rich and poor, a whole population seems sojourning there. Horses, mules, and camels browse in the luxuriant thickets, while among them, under their very feet, as it were, children sport in noisy glee.

Single or in companies, the elder people move sedate, conversing on the stirring omens of the times, and anticipating doubtfully the approaching end of the world.

Here we see a score of faces, where, on pages of Epicurean voluptuousness, skepticism and irony write the Sadducee. These we hear de-

riding the notion of a resurrection as connected with Messiah's coming.

Anon, with stately mien and slow, behold a solemn company, whose long blue fringes, and ascetic visages, and broad phylacteries proclaim the PHARISEE. These uphold the expected resurrection as the hope of the promise of God made unto the fathers. How else, say they, shall Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob inherit the land wherein they were strangers? Hence, while they defend the correctness of the herald's message herein, they are offended by the humiliating preparation he imposes. Pompous, proud, and scrupulous, they regard themselves as holy. The people so revere them. Must they confess in Jordan?

"Behold," exclaims a youthful Roman, leaning on his spear, and with a purple cloak lightly thrown around his burnished armor, "yonder tall figure, seemingly bereft of feet, how still he skims along the ground! Inform me, friend," he cries, addressing a citizen of Jerusalem, "what strange fantasy bewilders his brain. I am but a stranger in these parts, and lately come from Rome."

"Thou must indeed be a stranger," replies the other, "not to know so holy a personage; such as he we call the truncated Pharisee, be-

cause, so deep is their meditation on holy things, they walk as if they had no legs."

"And yonder figure with a helmet, or some kind of vizor drawn down upon his face—declare to me the meaning of that riddle," asks again the spearman.

"Ah," is the reply, "he is of another class, still more distinguished for holiness. So pure are their thoughts, that they cover their eyes from beholding aught above the ground they tread upon."

"And lo!" the pagan cries, "a third strange prodigy, thrusting his head among the branches, entangling himself in thickets, jostling against the by-standers, and endangering the safety of his scull at every tree or trunk. Surely he must be insane!"

"Insane!" the other answers, pitying the ignorance of his inexperienced questioner. "No, thou poor uncircumcised pagan, of all others this is the holiest kind of Pharisee. So bent are they on purity, that, lest the sight of women should inflame them, they shut their eyes entirely, and trust their heads to God."

"And the more fools they!" exclaims a youthful by-stander, who has heard the dialogue, and, with this abrupt comment, glides away and disappears in the throng.

The voice is familiar ; it is years since we heard it : what can the young Barabbas be doing here ? Somewhat else, we fear, than confession of sins in Jordan is his mission.

Anon our attention is attracted by the brazen trumpet blast of an approaching cohort, and the tramp of armed men shakes the outer sandy platform. Disbanded from their weary night-march, the armed troops pour in toward the welcome river.

“ Whither away, comrade ? ” exclaims the spearman to one of the new-comers, as he rests his limbs upon the grateful sward.

“ Into Petra ; so 'tis said in the ranks. ”

“ And wherefore ? ” continues the foreigner.

“ In sooth, it little becomes me to tell. The fair daughter of Aretas, so it is said, not liking the manners of her lately-wedded lord, our master Herod, hath fled unto her father, and complained of barbarous usage, whether with reason or not is no affair of ours. We are going to chastise the father in recompense for the insult of the daughter. ”

But now from the innermost bank of the river rises clear and keen the voice that oft has made rocks and deserts ring, and hearts quake, and whose music vibrates like a bell sonorous and full. Up rise the listless idlers,

Pharisee and peasant, Sadducee and soldier, citizen and thief, priest and publican, and move in motley crowds toward the VOICE; for, however unwelcome be the searching truths proclaimed, men will gladly endure them, though sent home with tingling pungency of application, if for no other reason than the native love of excitement, and the universal admiration of oratorical eloquence.

At the root of an aged sycamore, at one horn of the crescent shore, where the eddying waters slowly circle upward against the stream, the herald Purifier stands, while far round the curving beach, crowding to the water's edge, and even climbing on the pendent branches, gather dense the listening crowd.

"Repent!" he cries, "and be purified, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand! Rend your hearts and not your garments, for the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart He will not despise. Enter, therefore, into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.

"But who," he cries, suddenly confronting a party of supercilious Pharisees and Sadducees, "who hath warned you to flee from the wrath

to come? Generation of vipers! think not to say within yourselves, 'We have Abraham to our father,' for I say unto you, God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

"And lo! the Lord will enter into judgment with you, ye ancients of his people, and ye princes thereof, for ye have eaten up the vineyard, and the spoil of the poor is in your houses. Woe unto you that make a covenant with death, and a compact with Hades, saying, 'When the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come nigh us.' The ax is laid at the root of the tree. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire. The hail shall sweep away your refuges of lies. Your covenant with death shall be disannulled. Your compact with Hades shall not stand; and when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, ye shall be trodden down by it. Bring forth, therefore, fruits meet for repentance."

"And what shall we do to escape the coming wrath?" exclaims a publican, aghast at such denunciation against those generally revered for highest holiness. "What can we do to escape the fearful judgment?"

"Repent," is the answer. "Exact from none more than is appointed you."

“And what shall we do?” cries a mail-clad veteran, more shaken in soul than by all the terrors of battle.

“Be gentle,” is the response; “put no man in terror, and be content with your wages. And come, confessing your guilt, be purified for the remission of sins.” And now, while scowling Pharisee and scoffing Sadducee stand aloof, the speaker descends into the water, treading firm upon the sandy bottom, and there come in rapid succession the trembling hearers of that solemn address, and are purified of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

But now, through the vast multitude goes round a rising murmur, a kindling thought within their breasts. What if this were He? Our Messiah himself? Come in disguise? Messiah, when he cometh, will he speak mightier words than these? Is not this the chosen of Israel? Shall we not lift the banner, and march with him to victory?

While such thoughts glow, and such murmurs pass from lip to lip, the quick ear of the herald catches the word, and in an instant the truth flashes on his mind. This fiery, this inflammable mass! Another hour, and they will blaze into open insurrection and revolt! He stops—ascends the bank—a sudden pallor on

his lip. The shore grows silent as the grave. That voice is heard, calm, low, but trembling.

"I indeed purify you with water unto repentance, but there cometh One mightier than I after me, the bands of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose! He shall purify you with the Holy Ghost and with fire! His fan is in his hand, and he shall thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into his garner, but the chaff he will burn up with fire unquenchable!"

But at this moment, from the outer edge of the crowd, through the opening ranks, advance a body of priests and Levites from Jerusalem, a formal embassy from the Sanhedrim. Confronting the hermit of the desert, they demand,

"Who art thou? Art thou the Christ?"

"I am not the Christ."

"What then? Art thou ELIAS?"

"I am not."

"Art thou that prophet?"

"No."

"Who art thou, then, that we may give *some* answer to them that sent us? What sayest thou of thyself?"

"I am the VOICE of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

“Wherefore PURIFIEST thou then, if thou be not the Christ, nor Elias, nor yet that prophet? Is it not written of Messiah that He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver?”

“I indeed purify you with water, but there standeth one among you whom ye know not. He it is who, coming after me, is preferred before me, the bands of whose sandals I am not worthy to unloose. He shall purify you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

“Repent, therefore, and flee from the wrath to come, for a fire is kindled in his anger that shall burn to the lowest Hades. Soon, coming in the clouds of heaven, shall appear One like unto the Son of Man. Then shall ye call to the rocks, Fall on us, and to the hills, Cover us; for the Heaven shall be rolled together as a scroll, and the stars fall down like figs from a fig-tree. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. A fiery stream shall issue and come forth before him, thousand thousands minister to him, ten thousand times ten thousand stand before him, the judgment sit, the books be opened. But which of us can dwell with the devouring fire, and who can lie down in everlasting burnings?”

Repent, repent, and flee from the wrath to come!"

Thus all the livelong day, the mighty prophet, than whom no greater had ever trod the soil of this our unredeemed world, warns of approaching doom that ancient, that most guilty people. And as, with rapid modulation of voice, theme, and gesture, he sways obedient hearts to changing tones of hope, of fear, of departed glory, and of penitent remorse, what feelings swell within his own exalted soul? Elated with success, does he aspire to earthly grandeur? And how far comprehends he what or what manner of times the Spirit of Christ which is in him doth signify?

Too severe have been the rigors of his youth, too long passion interdicted, too long his communion clear with nature and with God therein, to permit his imagination now to be dazzled with any unsubstantial splendor of earthly pageantry.

As the prophets, his predecessors of yore, beholding events in space, but not in time, with vivid coloring, but without perspective, yielded themselves to bursts of divine inspiration, uttering words whose proportionate bearing on the present and the future they could ill define, foreshadowing events whose magnitude and dis-

tance they could never harmonize, so are the mind and utterance of this precursor of the nobler strain of God's eternal word.

And when at eventide his voice is hushed, and sunset beams come slanting through the verdant arches, the solemn throng depart with silent pace, dispersing through those tranquil glades.

"One among us," they exclaim, "whom yet we know not? Messiah here? Concealed,—disguised? Ah, then, what mighty moment is impending! when the great trumpet shall be blown, the ensign lifted, those fiery splendors dazzle every eye, and many come from north and south, and east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven!"

With such earnest, believing, and rejoicing hearts, do a few there address themselves with penitence to prepare to meet their king and Lord. Others, less spiritual, give way to cavils, questions, doubts, and endless surmise. Interminable debates arise; involved prognostication; till night spreads over all her peaceful sable, and beneath the dusky arcades thousands lie wrapped in slumber, unconscious of the presence of their king. And the placid moon and her attendant stars gleam on the now calm bay of the Jordan, unbroken by a ripple, save far in

mid-channel, where the wild stream sends up a hoarse murmur.

And yet there among them lieth one, clad in no royal apparel, girt with no cimeter, crownless, scepterless, unattended, and unknown, wrapped like the meanest in his muffled robe, his head pillowed at the root of a lofty palm—
ONE whom in very deed they know not—One who, but yesterday, stole noiselessly across the sandy terraces outside this alluvial Eden, entered, unwatched, this assembly of Israel, wandered from point to point, observing all, himself all unobserved, and who now lies here at our feet.

May we, then, dare to tread the hallowed ground on which his head reposes? May we dare to look upon that serene and lovely face, half upturned to the moon; which shines flickering through the leaves? He sleeps. That thousands round us, whose dim forms and vaguely-revealed outlines we trace every where—that these should sleep here on the ground, subdued with all the brute creation equally into the image of death, this is naught strange; but to dare to look down upon this one being, as we hear his deep and regular breathing, to think where we have seen him heretofore, what we knew of him even then, and then to say he

sleeps, methinks I feel a strange and solemn awe upon me, mingled with a lively joy.

Blessed being! lowly in thy slumber! What joy thus to be permitted to steal near to thy repose! And when, perhaps, thine unclouded eye we might not dare to meet, what happiness to be permitted thus to gaze upon thy face—calm as death—dimly revealed in the changing twilight, in all its majestic loveliness of serene repose!

Here, at last, we feel we have found the being who can never leave us, whom we can never leave. Sleeping or waking, henceforth, in his joy and in his sorrow, in sickness or health, in city or in wilderness, by shore or on the deep, in life or in death, we say in imagination, what shall separate us from the side of this man whom we have found, upon whose face we once have looked!

And oh, without imagination—in the simple truth of our souls, what in life or in death, in time or in eternity, shall separate us from the side of that being who first looked on us! Let us, then, watch by him there the livelong night of his repose, the unsuspecting multitude around, the stars calmly holding vigil above, the unsleeping Jordan ceaselessly hurrying by.

Yea, even let us likewise watch the livelong

night of this dream-life, the slumbering dead around, the restless Jordan of time murmuring on to oblivion, heaven's starry sentinels above us, Jesus by our side; and when the morning dawns, awaking, we will sing, Thou hast redeemed us by thy blood, and made us kings and priests to God, and we shall reign with thee!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PURIFICATION AND TEMPTATION
OF JESUS.

NIGHT wanes. The purple dawn tinges the eastern mountains. A gradually increasing hum of renewed life echoes far and wide across the rapid river under its canopy of mist. Far out of the camp, shouts of huntsmen ring free and clear; hounds bay, and the chase spreads music through the woods.

While all is cool, and the sultry heats of the day are not begun, again is lifted up the clarion voice of the unwearied forerunner, summoning Israel's thousands to penitential purification. Again the leafy camp is deserted, and the living shore peopled with a dense throng, to which fresh accessions are continually arriving from all Judea and all the region beyond Jordan.

Behold now the Purifier in the grateful stream, his toga and girdle laid aside, waiting for the obedient confessors.

A person steps from the throng, and, laying aside his outer garments, enters the laving tide. They meet, and the unknown stranger and the herald Purifier stand one moment confronted.

The clear keen glance of the prophet fathoms the profound abyss of the mild eye of the stranger, and his very soul seems passing in that entranced vision of rapture.

What fascination do those gentle orbs, living fountains of light, exercise upon him? What celestial influence suspends his faculties in that absorbing thrill of emotions, unfelt before? Why stands he dumb, motionless, inert? Shall the mighty prophet of inspired energies quail before the gaze of a youthful artisan? With tremulous lip, at length, and suppressed tones of intense feeling, he murmurs,

“Comest *thou* unto me? I have need to be cleansed of thee!”

Oh hallowed scene, oh precious words! The prophet himself, a lowly penitent, has recognized his Savior! And no more than these few stifled words can the ear discern of all his laboring soul strives to utter, while his lips move fruitlessly.

Then breathes the low melodious response, “Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.”

With these words, resigning himself to the hands of the agitated Purifier, he disappears beneath the wave, sad emblem of another burial in a colder Jordan stream, then rises to the light again, in blessed type of mightier birth from out

the womb of death. But as he wrings from his dark glossy locks the dripping element, no confession of sin breaks from his lips.

Alone, of all the thousands who there have stood before, he stands, and utters not a word of self-reproach. His hands are clasped, his eye upturned, his lips move, but silently, in prayer. With what surprise do all the people gaze, inquiring! What be the thoughts of the great forerunner himself, now likewise gazing to the sky? What sees he there? And why does one face after another turn upward, until now the whole shore is looking into the cloudless blue?

From the center of the parting empyrean darts out a visible shape like a dove, hovering nearer and nearer, rising, falling, waving, undulating, till at length the radiant bird, emblem of the Holy Ghost, alights upon him with caressing wing, while from on high peals out a thunder-tone,

“THOU ART MY BELOVED SON, IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED.”

Fixed in a stupor of wonder remains the herald Purifier, fixed the terror-stricken throng; no hand moves, no pulse seems to beat. Right forth from the water, through the thick throng, through the outermost trees, that silent stranger goes, and disappears upon the sandy verge of the valley.

Not till he is gone, and men have stood long gazing upon one another in suspense, do they seem to wake to the reality. And when, all at once, they begin to perceive that it was no dream, but a palpable transaction, what turbulent explosion ensues on every side!

A noise of the whole moving mass is heard, as, torrent-like, they sweep impetuous, breaking through the thickets, and, trampling upon one another, dash like a foamy billow out upon the sandy beach. In vain. Far as the eye can reach no living thing appears. There rise the gloomy mountains, there spread the solitary wastes, while above wheels undisturbed the poised bird of prey. What might have been the result of that first burst of popular enthusiasm we can not conjecture. But the wave is dashed, the reflux waters are absorbed by the earth again, and naught remains but here and there a flush of excited feeling, a gush of frothy declamation. The fickle-crowd remain encamped, and, save in some deep hearts, the scene is soon remembered only as a dream.

But if it be comparatively easy to penetrate the workings of these vulgar minds, and see emotion undergo her chameleon transformations, if it be not impossible partly to conceive the reflections of the great Purifier himself, and in

some degree reproduce them in ourselves, how different when we follow on the swift wings of fancy the steps of the fugitive.

We see him gain the sand, and, treading rapidly southward a short distance, re-enter the glades below the camp, concealing himself from search. And now, as slowly with him we win the toilsome way through the pathless thicket, and view the total abstraction from all outward things that characterizes him, how do our minds shrink back hopelessly from the attempt to reproduce within ourselves the thoughts that must be his!

The sun gains the zenith, and the sultry air grows stifling. He heeds it not. The sun goes down; he marks it not. Mists rise murky; he is unconscious of the fact. Seemingly without fatigue, he plies the same measured tread.

A lion rushes out upon him, lashing his sides with his tail; he walks unmoved on, and the king of the forest slinks mute into cover. Close before the tiger, with his eye of fire, moves the heedless man, and the complaining brute shrinks deeper in his lair.

Leaving now the Jordan as it approaches Asphaltites, he crosses the westward sands toward the cliffs. What thoughts be these that do so exhaust from all outward manifestation the soul

of this man, leaving his face a blank, inscrutable in its mysterious beauty to the keenest speculation, making his pale countenance as void of intelligible token as are the sands he treads upon destitute of verdure? What influence breathes round him, thus quelling ravenous instincts? What energy supplies this endurance of such superhuman toil?

Far into night he travels, and, the Jordan left behind, the sandy plains themselves disappearing, grim precipices rise on every side, inaccessible cliffs tower before him, around which he must seek a tortuous ascent. Chasms yawn behind, and at every turn caverns open, from whose rugged jaws the damp blast rushes, and through whose hollowed womb the travelers' footfall makes a doubling reverberation.

Were we capable of knowing the precise stature and stage of development to which that mind had been permitted to attain in its earthy incarceration at the time of his coming to the Jordan; could we but occupy the dim debatable ground between the finite and the infinite, and therein locate the precise boundaries of that mind's temporary restrictions; could we but estimate in any human computation the mysterious impulse given to his hitherto imprisoned attributes by the descent upon him of the Holy

Ghost, and by the voice of paternal recognition—voice, perhaps, not alone designed to affect the lookers on in that wonderful moment; were we, in short, adequate thus to comprehend the mystery of his incarnation who was God made flesh, we might presume to discourse of his thoughts, and to reproduce them within ourselves.

But as it is, we may esteem ourselves only too happy in being permitted to look upon the outside, to see the places where he goes, the mien he bears, the deeds he does, the words he utters, and the events that transpire.

Shall we, then, witness his slumbers in some remote recess—slumbers, alas! not always peaceful as when first we found him on the populous river's marge, but slumbers where there is struggling, and terror, and agony, and fierce writhings of soul? Ah! why is this? what unhallowed power has liberty, in these dark retreats, to breathe his gloomy insinuations through the mind of the lonely fugitive?

Shall we witness his waking hours, when he walks forth to the light of day, still wrestling in spirit, as we judge from that pallid brow, that moving lip, and face upraised in prayer? Shall we see him beneath the vertical rays of an unmitigated sun, where no fountain springs to quench his thirst, no verdure to relieve the glare,

but every peak and pinnacle of the ruddy rocks seems fiery with the intolerable splendor—shall we then note his failing step, his unnerved languor?

And when night comes round again, and in the somber gathering shades a thousand beasts prowl forth, and their discordant cries echo far and near; when the very place of his retreat hears their stealthy tracks, their fierce pantings, and the gloom is lurid with their fiery eyes; when from his damp couch creeps the cold asp, the slimy adder coils, and the red scorpion rattles from his crevice in the rock, and the slimy ooze of their trail is left upon his very pillow; while through the palpable obscure flit spectral vampires with unearthly noises, and the raven croaks from her sentinel perch on the threshold, and the screech-owl echoes a reply, shall we still hold vigil by the sleeper's side, and ask, What means this fearful ordeal? Why this outcast driven here?

Yea, in such scenes let us contemplate his endurance, and by all these outward horrors strive to symbolize faintly to our conception the agonies of that mind's encounter, day after day, night after night, with all the renewed and subtle assaults of an incorporeal foe.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ELUCIDATION.

NEXT to the crucifixion, the scene we are approaching is, of all others, most profoundly mysterious. The difficulty lies not in externals. Principles of mind the most recondite, and of vastest scope, are involved. Hence it becomes indispensable to the successful representation of the conflict to unfold briefly its theory.

The nature of temptation can only be rightly understood by first having right views of holiness and right views of sin. Especially is this true if we would appreciate as we ought the wonderful fact that the Son of God was tempted in all points like as we are.

Now holiness, in every being, infinite or finite, is of the same nature. It is in conformity to the law of love. In creatures, this law respects their fellow-creatures subordinately, God principally, since God is infinitely superior to them all. In the Creator, this law can not look up to some higher being as it does in us, because He is the Most High. Hence to him the law of love respects the three persons of the Trinity

and all created beings. Between the persons of the Trinity there is a perfect and mutual love, which is the most complete fulfillment of the law of love, either possible or conceivable; and from the Trinity to all creatures there is perfect fulfillment of law by impartial love. Hence holiness in the Creator is obedience to the law of love toward equals and inferiors, while holiness in the creature is obedience to the same law toward equals and superiors. Its essence is the same, only the direction and the objects are different.

Sin, then, would be the same in nature, whether in the Creator or in the creature. In God we are assured there is no sin. And this is the joy of the universe; for if there were even a spot or stain of sin in God, the universe would be turned into a dungeon of woe: For the very essence of sin being disobedience to the law of love, if there were a spot of it in God, what would we behold? The persons of the Trinity, not perfectly loving, but alienated, and the Creator, not perfectly benevolent to the creature, but alienated from them. This would be sin in the Creator, and would threaten universal, everlasting, and irremediable disaster. Sin, on the other hand, in the creature, is disobedience to the law of love toward God and toward one's

neighbor. Alienation from God, alienation from his neighbor. Thus sin would be of the same nature in the Creator if it should exist there, and in the creature where it does exist.

Hence we see what temptation means. It is any influence brought to bear on minds to break up their harmonious love in all their relations between superiors, equals, and inferiors. Love downward and upward, from side to side. Any influence tending to produce alienation is, properly, temptation. And there is no temptation that can not be shown to be in one way or another reducible to this.

Hence, when the Scripture tells us that God can not be tempted of evil, we understand what it means. Not that God is not free; not that He is an infinite necessity or fate, who can not help doing what he does; but that, being omniscient, and absolutely certain of all possible truth, no conceivable influence can be brought to his cognizance in the shape of motive to alienation either between the persons of the Trinity or between them and the creature. God must first lose omniscient intuition of the woe of such alienation before a temptation thereto could be possibly framed so as to touch him.

Hence, on the other hand, we see that creatures could not exist without temptation. If

omniscience renders God inaccessible to temptation, it follows that finite minds must be liable to temptation. And we may say there were only three things for God to choose: to exist forever in solitude; or, to create all creatures omniscient, which is absurd; or, to create creatures exposed to temptation. For any creature of finite mind, in the midst of a vast universe, and of organizations of minds of varied powers, must meet with things it can not understand, see powers it can not wield, and be thus exposed to ambition, distrust, self-reliance, and alienation.

Hence further we see, not only that creatures, however holy, can not be exempt from temptation, but we see precisely where the temptation will strike them. It will be in their faith; that is, their affectionate reliance upon the testimony of their Creator. The very first fact that meets every creature, I care not how high and holy he may be, is limitation, and so what is *felt* to be privation. He meets questions he can not answer, he beholds powers he can not wield, and possessions that are not his. The temptation will then approach him precisely in this shape: "Does God think I am not capable of understanding these things? Does he tell me that if I attempt it I shall die? That the only

way for me is implicitly to rely on him? Nay, does he not rather fear lest I attain equality with him, and be as God myself? Does he not seek to keep me down? Shall I not therefore refuse implicit reliance, assert my own prerogative, and be as God myself?" This, it strikes me, is substantially the form of temptation, to which, from the very nature of finite mind, every creature must be exposed.

This view may be illustrated by the language of Scripture. "Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness." This may be regarded as God's charge against any fallen creature—against fallen beings in general, addressed through the person of some eminent individual.

Thus the Assyrian of Ezekiel xxxi. may perhaps be taken as a symbol of fallen creatures in general and in particular, so that the very process of a fall from original holiness may be indicated. Comparing him to a cedar-tree, "Thus was he fair in his greatness," is the description, "in the length of his branches, for his root was by the great waters. The cedars in the garden of God could not hide him, nor any tree in the garden of God was like unto him in beauty; I have made him fair by reason of the multitude

of his branches, so that all the trees of Eden that were in the garden of God envied him. Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, because thou hast lifted up thyself in height, and he hath shot up his top among the thick boughs, and his heart is lifted up in his height, * * therefore I have delivered him into the hand of the mighty One of the heathen; He shall surely deal with him. I have driven him out for his wickedness. * * In the day when he went down to the grave I caused a mourning for him. * * I made the nations to shake at the sound of his fall, when I cast him down to Hades with them that descend into the pit."

By such descriptions I understand the Holy Spirit to indicate the process of temptation of any and of all finite minds. And herewith agrees, in a striking manner, the language of a certain tempter in Eden: "Hath God said ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" This is, indeed, a beautiful paradise—a blissful abode. One would imagine happiness might be perfect here. But does God give you all you want? Has he deprived you of nothing? Has he limited you not at all? shown you no desirable things you may not enjoy? And the woman said, "We may eat of the fruit of the garden, but of the fruit of the tree which is in

the midst of the garden, God hath said, 'Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.'" We have a vast variety of powers and pleasures, sources abundant of knowledge and joy. But there is a limit. There is a prohibition—a privation; and death the penalty. And the serpent said, "Ye shall not surely die. For God doth know that, in the day ye eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil." God deprives you of the full development of your powers, for fear you will equal him. He dwarfs you to the stature of childhood. He wants to keep you down—to keep you immature, dependent, abject. Therefore assert your rights—declare your independence—renounce this credulous subjection to him.

Such appears to me the necessary explanation of the temptation of any and of every created mind, angelic, or super-angelic, or of any other sort. It is a temptation through which it seems to me they must pass, or not be created. Those that yielded fell through unbelief. Those that did not yield lived by faith; as it is written, the just shall live by faith.

By these principles we are prepared to understand the temptation of the Son of God. Before he became Son of God, existing in form of

God, and co-equal with God, and God himself, he could not be tempted, as I have before shown. Never could universal possession of all riches feel privation as the creature does, and so be tempted as the creature is. Nor could he, without such privation, ever be tempted to distrust a higher power, since, while retaining the form of God, there was no higher power.

Consequently, in order that he might be tempted, it became necessary that he should in all things be made like unto his brethren, that he might be "a merciful and faithful high priest;" so that, having himself suffered temptation, he might be able to succor them that are tempted; so that he might be perfected as captain of salvation through such sufferings; so that "he might *learn obedience* by the things which he suffered."

To this end, "though he was RICH, yet for our sakes he became POOR." That is, as we, being creatures, are subject to privation, he became subject to it voluntarily, privation incalculable.

To this end, not regarding that equality with God which he had enjoyed from eternity as a thing to be tenaciously retained, he emptied himself, suspended the exercise of the full functions of deity, took on him a servile form, be-

came an unconscious infant, and thus, being in fashion as a man, like in all points, he became susceptible of temptation, which before was impossible. Now his knowledge was, for the time being, as truly limited as that of man, and he as truly dependent on his mother's training, and the Sacred Scriptures, and the HOLY GHOST, for all his ideas, knowledge, and power, as any other child. Thus he grew in knowledge. Thus he said, "I can of mine own SELF do nothing." And it is not to be supposed that he had two selfs. Thus he could say, "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, nor the angels, nor the Son, but the Father." Thus, too, he became capable of feeling want, privation, limitation, which before he could not. Yea, he became amazed, and his soul exceeding sorrowful even unto death.

But the consequence of this step would be inevitably to constitute him at once the especial object of temptation. Like a lamb cast among hungry wolves, like a diamond cast among needy beggars, so was he cast among the powers of evil. And the assault upon him would commence with a fierceness and violence, a voracity proportionate to the rank he sustained and the consequences depending. This assault would be conducted upon precisely those

principles by which it would be on any and every finite being, as already explained. It would especially concentrate upon the crisis of his entrance into public life, when youth is ever most sensitive. It would form the key-note to that life's whole struggle. The same temptations which should dog his steps, and in manifold ways assail him all through his career, and which should darken to the close, and the resistance of which should cost his blood, these would be the very ones which would meet him at the threshold, to seduce or to scare him from his path. And they would come with all the power hell could command. Angels had already fallen—the human race—cherubim, seraphim, thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers. There was but one step higher temptation could itself be tempted to aspire, and that was, to one of the persons of the Trinity. That was not possible while that person retained his fullness. But no sooner did that Lord of Glory stand a man, and emptied of that fullness, than the deep heart of hell vomited forth, in sulphurous eruption, to suffocate, blast, wither, and consume. If he is swept by the burning tide, a throne is emptied in heaven, the Trinity broken up, redemption eternally defeated.

Such, then, being the posture of affairs, we

behold Christ driven of the spirit into the wilderness. Let us consider the assault made upon him, and discover there these elements of temptation, if indeed they exist.

* * * * *

CHAPTER XIX.

TEMPTATION AND VICTORY.

FORTY times hath the sun rolled up from behind yon blue hills of Arabia, forty times stood vertical above that bituminous caldron of the Dead Sea, forty times gone down behind the western cliffs, and yet the conflict is not terminated; nay, rather, is approaching to its climax of assault.

April has rolled away over the broad plains of Judea, Galilee, and Gilead since first he sought these rocks. There flowers have laughed in the vales, almonds have ripened, and the orange bowers bent with golden fruit; the latter rains have invigorated the joyous soil, and the wheat fields have stood nodding before the reaper, and the songs of the sower and of the gleaner have mingled on those fertile meadows; but in these drear abodes no rain has cherished a blade of grass, no song, save of the wheeling eagle, filled the air, but on every side bleak desolation reigns.

But hark! a gush of wild, low music breathes fitfully about him, though whence the ear in

vain attempts to discover. Those unearthly harmonies seem born of no mortal minstrelsy, as from above they distill their bewildering richness upon his every sense, or from beneath rise as out of the slumbering rocks.

But as their soothing spell is cast upon his fevered spirit, sudden memories of the past, of home, of childhood, rush with unaccountable vividness and rapidity through his softened soul. Unbidden tears gather in his dreamy eye. A mother's voice seems sounding in his ear. Cool breezes of the mountain fan his cheek. He stands once more, in fancy, beneath the high nopal, hears the sighing of the zephyr through palm and pomegranate, and beholds the ripe fruit gleaming in the sun. While such remembrances subdue his heart with unutterable regret, suddenly harsh discords grate upon the ear, and the disenthralled consciousness reverts to the stern realities of his present position. Yet a voice, all pathos, sighs through his soul subtle words of sympathy; words revealing themselves to the inner sense rather than the outer, betraying thus no mark of supernatural origin.

"Remote from the home of his childhood, the innocent exile perishes with hunger. How pleasant the warbling song that lonely mother

sings, unconscious of his fate! Hushed how quickly, could she but behold him now! Soon the agony will be over. Not much longer will frail nature sustain this strange ordeal beneath this pitiless sky of fire. These limbs, so supple once, all shrunk and useless now; these cheeks, all hollow; these eyes, cavernous as the dead. Soon must close the unnatural scene. 'Tis well that mother wots not of the deed. No parent's heart could brook the sight, nor choose but break.

“Yet hold—amazing thought!—this is the same the Voice declared the Son of God. Is this paternal? this a heavenly father's care toward a well-beloved son? Incredible, unjust, unkind! If this the treatment of the well-beloved Son, what may not lower ties receive? earth's perishing millions, creation groaning and travailing in pain? Impossible ordeal of love! Either the powers and dignities of the sonship a delusion, and this the tyranny of infinite caprice, or the unnatural want should cease. One proper word of self-reliant prerogative, and the bare and blackened lava will supply these constitutional cravings.”

So urged the invisible enemy, approaching here his mightiest work, to swerve from right an uncreated mind, empty an eternal throne, and add to hell's domain a vassal of name. Man

he has already swerved from uprightness ; angels and archangels plucked from the sublime estate. But one step more remains to universal victory, or universal anarchy at least.

“Place within my scope,” so he in heart defies the Eternal Three, “an uncreated virtue. Emptied of unequal attribute, stake upon his endurance the hopes of all the myrmidons of hell ; let his success wrest from my scepter all the myriads thou mayest ordain, and whelm me thereby in direct overthrow and irrecoverable helplessness, give me but the access I require, let His impunity from sin and from eternal woe result from no omnipotent advantage, and I will stake all on that issue. Not angel nor archangel would I thus publicly assail, as pledged redeemer of my lawful captives. Angels and archangels in legions have already bowed to signalize my triumph. Higher aims demand my care. Heaven’s Lord alone can provoke immortal hate to imperil all in such essay !”

And heaven’s Lord here stands, on desert rocks, emptied of unequal fullness, a man, to meet and to endure, in behalf of myriads chosen, the utmost craft of hell. By the same ordeal tried that cost those myriads their primæval purity, by the same sophistries assailed, with deeper virulence, more overwhelming onset.

Privation is the price of existence to every finite being. Purity itself can not escape that ordeal but by annihilation or by infinitude. In privation, angels and men encountered the first disturbing shock. The line of poised uprightness was disadjusted: they fell. In privation stands before us now the LORD himself, creator both of angels and of man, enduring more than they avoided, and resisting more than they yielded unto. Inscrutable, then, to him, as unto us, the secret things of God. Intolerable, as to us, the wolfish pangs of famine. Specious the doubts of paternal love, the denial of the right to afflict innocence with arbitrary anguish. Subtle the prompting to renounce dependence upon that unexplained providence, ensnaring the seduction to test the prerogative of the sonship by an act of self-support. So had begun apostasy; so, eternal ruin. Suffering, then, these deadly sophistries of the invisible foe to reach their utmost evolution, calmly, out of the depths of an unshaken FAITH, he answers,

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

And hell shakes, trembling to her murkiest cave. Deprive the soul of all—increase the pangs of want to the utmost—yet, if Faith re-

tain communion with her God, life is unimpaired; but, loose her hold on God, and the soul lives no longer, the power of death begins.

When ocean has been lifted up in one mighty wave, and dashed in thunder on the beach, then the refluent water, with an equal fury, rushes out into the deep; so, when the soul has risen in waves of terrible essay, and the shock is past, swift the unstable torrents of emotion recoil and gather in the opposite extreme.

Quicker than thought the desert sinks, and temple battlements rise bodily beneath our feet. There bursts below the chant of Israel's worship. There rolls the smoke of sacrifice. Here without, the sheer descent darkens and dizzies the brain of the helpless Jesus. That strange, mysterious prompting, not unknown to humanity, flashes across his soul, to plunge into the abyss—an emotion inscrutable, urgent, darkly sublime; and, withal, a thought imbodifies itself within him.

“Here find one all decisive test. If it be His will to lengthen life, HE can as easily prevent thy fatal fall as now sustain thee under famine. Cast, then, the alternative on him. Show that faith is absolute. Show that thy endurance of famine unto death is from faith. Compel Him to the alternative, and thus establish thy son-

ship. For it is written of Messiah, 'He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.'*

"Away then! display no half-reliant faith. Leap boldly forth. If He preserve thee, thou art his son indeed. If not, thou wilt but die, and that by his permission, and death were a release compared with lingering agonies of want."

Thus the mighty adversary brings the swift alternative of presumption and blind fatality. That emaciate form just totters o'er the verge, hurried with tempestuous suddenness on. No time is given, no pause for reflection. "Now," the maddening impulse is, "now brave the awful leap!"

But in vain the complex forces of the pit resolve their many combinations to swerve that suffering soul one line from faith in God. "It is also written," is the prompt reply, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

A deeper convulsion agitates the whole abyss of woe. Dependence is not destiny. Faith is not blind fatalism. Freedom is not impaired by

* It is here presumed that the adversary was correct in regarding this as a Messianic psalm. He surely would not weakly rely on a palpable misapplication.

foreknowledge. Providence can not warrant presumption.

Instant the mighty master shifts the scene. A solitary mountain cone supplants the golden parapet beneath our feet, and clouds encircle us. The sudden silence of the desert hushes the loud oblation of the evening's worship.

Before our quickened vision, by more than mortal dioramic art, begin to pass, in living pageant, all the pomps and powers of time. Antediluvian prodigies of daring might precede. Egyptian mysteries next, and stately splendors of hierarchal despotism. Babylonian myriads shed their golden glories over Asshur's plains. Medo-Persian Cyrus pours a milder silver ray, while Alexander sweeps with brazen-coated Argives from northern snows to India's golden strand. And, merging all ancient times and ancient grandeur in one grander empire of an iron strength, Rome rises, and her legions march terrific, and her eagle stoops in conquering dread.

About us mingle shouts of victory and sounds of luxurious wealth. Clouds of incense breathe, and garlands and wreaths are strewn at our feet. We behold the mistress of the world,

“With towers and temples proudly elevate,
Porches and theaters, baths and aqueducts,
Statues and trophies, and triumphal arcs,
Gardens, and groves, and mighty monuments.”

"Ah, Nazarene," a voice seems to say, as rising out of the depths of his own being, "where is thy promised throne amid all this moving, busy world of power, pomp, and splendor? What of that insignificant point of earth, thy patrimonial Palestine? Upon thy ancestral seat, who now, or what is sitting? On all thy hills Rome's eagles build their eyries. And who art thou? Amid the might of nations, a carpenter! Amid thrones, scepters, diadems; altars, robes, miters; arts, science, commerce; philosophy, poetry, religion; laws, politics, ancient systems, a base artisan! Thy mother weeps in widowhood in far Galilee.

"And wouldst thou presume to impress a change upon the gigantic whole of systems vast, inweaving, all-comprehending, impregnable? Wouldst thou introduce an element foreign to their all-pervading spirit? the instinct of a world's organic life? Art thou indeed so bold as, unmoved, to touch the life of all these energies with unguarded hand, thy name all unwhispered in the ear of nations? Or if, perchance, it came to Cæsar's hearing, what would he name thee, execrable Jew!

"How, then, canst thou invade such sway as now thine eyes behold? Where be thine armies—thy armaments of war?

“Yet change were not impossible, not even to one obscure like thee. Change befits a race all godlike—progress, development, endless perfectibility—and thine is the genius of mastery sufficient to the benign attempt. To genius, united with pure philanthropy, what boundless scope is here! Once ascend the summit—once grasp the reins of wide supremacy—how easy, with thy comprehensive intellect, to dispose all to the gradual amelioration and aggrandizement of the race! Lo! how the ocean of the mighty popular mind, now sighing, surges to and fro, dimly yearning for her godlike destiny and for thee!

“But, without Power, the attempt were vain—a reckless waste. Without the prestige of military renown, pure truth is only powerless innovation. Purity herself falls martyr to such insane hardihood. Regard the spirit of the age. Weigh well the balanced scale of dynasties, and systems civil, military, philosophical, religious. These well studied, all their power engrossed, the universal mind prepared by judicious steps for the evolution of new ideas, the very genius of humanity will then smile upon thy path, and crown thee universal benefactor as well as conqueror. Concede a little to the honest prejudices of the reverend Sanhedrim. Advance not

too far before them. Gain time to develop new ideas gradually. Spare a little their obvious vices. Raise at the proper crisis the Lion standard. Speak a few magical words to wake the martial prowess of the ancient theocratic soul. Kindle in the field that peculiar religious enthusiasm before which Rome's banner must go down. Last of an ancient line, let all thy mighty sire dash thrilling through thy veins. Speak burning on thy tongue! Leap to the head of such a host as the world ne'er saw before, and pour in thunder on the gates of the Eternal City, to plant the Lion-banner in the eagle's eyries of the Capitol!

"But ah! if thou wilt not do this—beware! Consider what a life opens in direful contrast before thee. Meanly, tamely, shalt thou sink down out of society. Thou shalt become an outcast, odious! The fickle populace, that follow thee a while in stupid admiration, shall weary at length of thy bigotry, and melt away. Yea, far in the future thou mayest discern a gathering storm—an hour of blackness and darkness. A crisis will come, when that all-pervading instinct of the world's great life, being trampled on, shall recoil, and trample upon thee. Thy heart will then become like wax. Thou wilt be given up, forlorn, forsaken of all the

world, to die—of all save one, thy mother, through whose soul in that dark hour thou shalt cause the sword to pierce.

“And in that hour, that dark and bitter hour, bethink thee, will that God thou vauntest befriend thee? or will he stand aloof? And will not then invisible legions from beneath swarm to wreak on thee the wrath of inexorable hate? Beware, O Nazarene, nor dare the unequal contest! Now I give thee warning—now, ere thou art committed—ere thy career is begun. Then, when unprotected thou shalt fall beneath me, there will be no pity; thou shalt sink to rise no more!”

Oh, fearful hour! last mastery of the desperate foe! False, but uttering dreadful truths! able to make that famine-stricken victim feel too keenly the sad presage of his inevitable fate. Despised and rejected of men—a worm, and no man, whose heart reproach must break! trembling at the half-disclosed abysses of demoniac rage, now darkly threatened! able to make his soul fire with sudden ardor for an easier path to universal blessing and universal aggrandizement at once.

He felt it—feels it all, and more than human heart can conceive or language utter. And

learning to the latest syllable the lesson of human temptation, he replies,

“Get thee behind me, Satan, for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve!”

At that instant, the foiled spirit, invisible hitherto, glares suddenly forth from cloudy volumes with unutterable meaning in his eye; then folding within his wreathed vapor, drifts like a rolling storm off through the gathering dusk of evening.

Then, through the twilight air, borne on gleaming pinions, preceded by symphonies of ethereal melody, diffusing odors of a heavenly clime, come circling down above that barren mountain cone a radiant, living wheel of angels, revolving jubilant around that now exhausted form, which lies buried in deathlike slumber.

All the livelong night do these celestial ministers gird that barren summit, infusing into the prostrate conqueror renewed energy of body, and breathing o'er his dreams the airs and harmonies of heaven.



MARY AT THE CROSS.

"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother."

BY MRS. HARRIET BEECHER STOWE.

O wondrous mother! since the dawn of time
Was ever joy, was ever grief like thine?
Oh! highly favor'd in thy joy's deep flow,
And favor'd e'en in this, thy bitt'rest woe.

Thou, once a tender, deeply serious maiden,
Through calm, deep loving years, in silence grew,
Full of high thought and holy aspiration,
Which, save thy Father, God's, no eye might view.

Poor was that home in simple Nazareth
Where thou, fair growing, like some silent flower,
Last of a kingly line—unknown and lowly,
O desert lily—pass'd thy childhood's hour.

And then it came—that message from the Highest,
Such as to woman ne'er before descended;
Th' Almighty's shadowing wings thy soul o'erspread,
And with thy life the life of worlds was blended.

What visions, then, of future glory fill'd thee,
Mother of King and kingdom yet unknown,
Mother, fulfiller of all prophecy,
Which through dim ages wond'ring seers had shown.

Well did thy dark eye kindle, thy deep soul
Rise into billows, and thy heart rejoice;
Then woke the poet's fire, the prophet's song
Tuned with strange burning words thy timid voice.



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